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PLAYS

BY

FRANCES . ANNE KEMBLE.

LONDON

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PLAYS

BY FRANCES ANNE KEMBLE.

AN ENGLISH TRAGEDY:

A PLAY, IN FIVE ACTS.

MARY STUART.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF SCHILLER.

MADemoiselle DE BELLE ISLE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, ROBERTS, & GREEN.

1863.

AN anecdote of real life, which I heard my father relate, suggested to me the Third Scene of the Third Act of the following Play, which I wrote as a dramatic fragment before the idea of the whole had occurred to me. The preceding and subsequent portions of the drama were afterwards added to that scene.

TO
THE REVEREND
WILLIAM HARNESS.

My kind and honoured Friend,

It is not without hesitation that I avail myself of your permission to dedicate this Play to you. Written between twenty and thirty years ago, it then challenged the indulgence of my friends, in spite of its many defects, as the possible promise of better things when I should have attained maturer powers. I, too, hoped what my friends were kind enough to expect, and looked forward to accomplishing something better; but alas! this is the only piece of work I have ever finished since the first essays of my school-girl days; and, therefore, most imperfect as it is, I have nothing better to offer you. Pray accept it, and with it the expression of my heartfelt regret that it is not a worthier token of the respect, gratitude, and affection with which I am

Yours most truly,

FANNY KEMBLE.

Dramatis Personæ.

LORD ALFORD.

JUDGE WINTHROP.

JOHN FORRESTER.

JAMES FORRESTER.

WILTON.

MOWBRAY.

ILLWORTH.

Gentlemen, Servants of LORD ALFORD and JUDGE WINTHROP.

ANNE, *Winthrop's wife.*

MARY, *Winthrop's sister.*

*The scene lies partly in London and partly at JUDGE WINTHROP'S
house in Surrey.*

ACT I.

SCENE 1.

A tavern in London. Enter JOHN and JAMES FORRESTER.

JOHN FORRESTER.

From Antwerp you shall certainly hear from me ;
And then as soon as I reach Ghent, and of my
Speeding on the voyage—how strange things
Seem to untravelled eyes—how Flanders ladies
And Flanders lace may look to an Englishman,
And all important matters, I will write of.

JAMES.

Especially forget not to apprise me
As soon as my uncle dies—for die he must,
I take it ; and, good John, when you come back,
And are the Honourable Sir John Forrester,
With sundry thousand pounds a-year, I beg
You 'll not forget your poorer younger brother.

JOHN.

Which way shall I remember thee ? with alms
From my new fortunes ?

JAMES.

Faith, it may be so ;
I shall be out at elbows presently,
An the dice use me not more courteously.

JOHN.

Dice seldom mend a tattered doublet, James.
Thou 'rt but a careless fellow, and I fear
That I shall find thee, when I do come back,
The poorer for my absence.

JAMES.

I do fear it ;
Good brother John, I fear it infinitely.
Thy wisdom was a kind of floating buoy
That held me up i' the midst of my unthrift ;
I fear when thou art gone, that I shall go
To the very bottom. Thou 'rt a lucky fellow !

JOHN.

Nay, now most men had said that, of the twain,
Thou wert the luckier : eldest of our house,
I yet have thence derived no good advantage,
Save the honour of being head of a family
More old than rich ; whilst thou, the curly darling
Of our old grandam Wentworth, didst inherit
Her fortune and a younger brother's privilege
To spend it like a madman, merrily :
And yet *I'm* lucky, sayest thou.

JAMES.

Very lucky :

You never play.

JOHN.

You might be lucky, too,
Upon those terms.

JAMES.

You never wish to play ;
That 's where you 're lucky.

JOHN.

No, nor ever wish
To cut a man's throat, or to steal his purse ;
Perhaps I 'm lucky, too, in that.

JAMES.

Most certainly,
For if you played, you might do one or both ;
I 'm sure I 've often thought I should do both.

JOHN.

Dear brother, what you thus speak jestingly
Sounds very sadly in my ears ; have patience,
If now, about to leave you quite alone,
For the first time since our poor father died,
I use a little the elder brother's right,
And leave thee, with these few hundred pounds I've
saved
Upon my last year's income, some few words
Of counsel ; dearest James, pray give me heed.

JAMES.

I would I could but mind as well as heed,
And do as well as listen—yet the money—

JOHN.

I do not want it, brother, and you may ;
You know I never play, and my outgoings
Are measured always by my incomings;
'T is yours, and yours alone.

JAMES.

Thanks, generous friend,

I'll try and spend, not lose it.

JOHN.

Prithee do.

Put not thy gentry into such ill company
As dicers, drinkers, tavern-haunting folk ;
Kites that seem doves, but hover round their prey
With beaks and talons whetted sharp for blood.
Cram not thine honour and thine happiness
Into that hollow cup, whence, with the dice,
They shall come tumbling in what fashion fortune
May please to order. Oh ! be still above
The power of chance, at least in thine own mind,
Dear James, nor put thy manliness and worth
At stake upon a hazard table. The money
Is nought, but that thou canst not win or lose

That, without losing at the self same time
An infinite treasure—thine own good esteem;
It is a deep stake, brother; do not risk it.

JAMES.

I will not say to thee that till thou come
I'll not touch dice, I fear to be forsworn;
But I will strive to be more moderate
In venturing; and if I can, I will not
Play while thou 'rt gone.

JOHN.

That's well, good fellow! well?

[Enter a Servant.]

SERVANT.

The captain is on board, sir, and the wind
Streaks with grey rippling lines the river's bosom;
Your clothes are in the ship, all things are ready.

JOHN.

I come immediately.

[Exit Servant.]

Brother, another word;
Here is a letter to my friend Judge Winthrop;
He'll see for thee into those scrolls and parchments
That we were looking over yesterday.
You'll find him, brother, a true Englishman;
I cannot give a man a better name.

JAMES.

I will set out to-morrow, brother.

JOHN.

Good—

While thou art there, perhaps it were as well
To think of another matter, James ; the Judge
Has a fair sister, a most charming lady,
Whom thou couldst easier love than I describe.
When you look at her, think of what I say ;
A lovely, loving wife were a better monitor
Than I can be ; sweet lips, and gentle eyes,
And woman's fond persuasion, should do more
To sunder thee from those ill-favoured mistresses,
The dice, than all my talking ; and besides,
'Twixt man and man there is a boundary
Not passable even by the closest kindred.
But, an thou once wert married, thou shouldst find
Each hour admonish thee not to betray
Thine own and others' happiness to play.
Come, let us go. I shall be late on board ;
Come with me to the stairs.

JAMES.

Would 't were to Flanders !

[*Exeunt the two FORRESTERS.*]

SCENE 2.

Another chamber in the tavern. A table at which ALFORD, ILLWORTH, WILTON, MOWBRAY, and others are sitting at dice.

ALFORD.

It's my throw.

ILLWORTH.

He will have the same, I'll wager.

MOWBRAY.

Impossible! he's had it three times running;
Poor Wilton here can't speak.

WILTON.

Come, sir, will you throw.

ALFORD.

There 't is again.

OMNES.

Again!

ILLWORTH.

I told you so:
I'd bet upon him, sir, for a thousand pounds;
He is the luckiest man in London.

WILTON.

And I

The most unlucky dog in all the world !

Some wine there, ho ! some wine !

MOWBRAY (*aside*).

Be careful, Wilton,

You mar your sole chance, if you lose your wits.

WILTON (*aloud*).

Sir, when one's money 's lost, one's wit 's lost too ;

It 's gone already, sir. Bring me some wine !

[*Servant brings in wine ; all the gentlemen drink, except*

ALFORD, ILLWORTH, and MOWBRAY.

ALFORD.

You should not drink, sir, when you play ; you see
I do not.

ILLWORTH.

No, my lord, nor I.

MOWBRAY.

Nor I.

Now Wilton, throw, and good success befriend you !

WILTON.

Thanks, friend ! (*throws*) that's well !

ALFORD (*throws*).

Yes, sir, and that is better.
Your stake is lost ; what, will you play again ?

WILTON (*rises*).

Damnation seize the dice ! I'm ruined, ruined.
Land mortgaged—money lost—my lord, my lord !

[ALFORD *converses with other gentlemen* ; MOWBRAY *walks up and down with WILTON, in great agitation.*

MOWBRAY.

For God's sake, sir, be patient ! 't is not possible.

WILTON.

I say 't is true ; I saw it, and I know it.

MOWBRAY.

What, man ! a lord play such a beggar's trick ?

WILTON.

It was a beggar's trick ; I'm sure he did it though !

ALFORD.

You seem disturbed, sir ; I'm afraid your losses
Something outwent your expectations ;
I shall be proud to give you your revenge.
Shall we play again ?

WILTON.

Oh ! by no means, my lord,
Your lordship's luck is more than I can cope with,
(*Aside*)—Backed by your lordship's dexterous sleight
of hand.

ALFORD.

I'm sorry, sir, my luck has been so great ;
Indeed I'm mostly lucky ; I could wish
I were not — I too often rob my friends.
Good evening, gentlemen, I see you're going ;
Good Master Wilton, a good even to you.

WILTON (*aside*).

The curses of a ruined man light on you !

[*Exeunt* WILTON, MOWBRAY, and the rest :
manent ALFORD and ILLWORTH.]

ALFORD.

There's a fool who puts his finger in the candle,
And cries because 't is burnt.

ILLWORTH.

I see, my lord,
You've not forgotten how to handle dice.

ALFORD.

No, Illworth : — and yet all 's but nothing either ;
Thou seest the goodly show I make in town here,
My carriages, my horses, and my servants.

ILLWORTH.

A comet's tail, a perfect blaze of splendour!

ALFORD.

All borrowed light, sir, for all that : I tell thee,
I'm the poorest man in Christendom ; and save
When every now and then a money bag
Without a head, like this fellow, comes to be squeezed,
I've but a sorry time with the petitions
Of a scurvy set of villains they call creditors.
And whither art thou bound ?

ILLWORTH.

My lord, to Florence.

ALFORD.

To Florence, ha ! what the game 's up in England ?
Or hast thou run a step beyond thy compass ?

ILLWORTH.

Fortune and credit are with me so wrecked,
That I must fly from England, which henceforth
Has nought but chains and prison bars for me.

ALFORD.

That's a pity! but you'll thrive in Florence, Illworth.
I'll give you letters to some friends of mine there;
Men of good purses, whom you'll find worth knowing.
You must not fail to find out old Matteo,
The man who makes the curious dice you wot of;
Somewhere in St. Peter's Street, near the Arno side.
I'll find the very name of the place for thee,
And give thee, too, an errand to him for me.
But that I've other quarry in pursuit,
I'd see fair Florence once again with thee.

ILLWORTH.

Your lordship means to stay in London?

ALFORD.

No.

I'm bound to Surrey; I shall visit there
A certain judge, who hath a pretty wife,
Upon some special business.

ILLWORTH.

Of his own,

Or yours, my lord? Do you know the lady?

ALFORD.

Yes,

After a fashion, I admired her once;
'T was thought she was an heiress, when I did so.

She lost her fortune, and, I thought, her looks ;
She 's married now — and has grown fair again.

ILLWORTH.

Poor lady ! I should say, poor gentleman !
Does your lordship purpose to remain there long ?

ALFORD.

Umph ! I can't tell, sir, till I see the lady.
I may have Cæsar's fortune, or I may
Sit ten years down before a female Troy :
I fear not much the latter chance, however.

ILLWORTH.

No ; your experience has not taught you fear.
The conqueror of our proudest city beauties
Could scarce be foiled by a simple country mistress.

ALFORD.

She is not country bred ; dost think I 'm whining
After some rosy Amaryllida ?
This lady would have shone a dazzling star
In the brightest court in Europe ; she is perfect !
So fair, so stately, so majestic,
I never saw her peer !

ILLWORTH.

Why, my good lord,
You 're sure in love.

ALFORD.

Perhaps I am, a little,
But not enough to puzzle me, good Illworth.
Farewell! good speed to Florence! and do n't forget
The hand thus, and they never fall amiss.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE 3.

A room in JUDGE WINTHROP'S house. ANNE is discovered sitting at work: enter to her MARY with her lap full of flowers.

ANNE.

Oh! I am glad you're come! the morning wears,
'Tis near on noon—we shall dine presently.
Why, where hast thou been? thy dress is all disordered,
And thy hair tangled, and all wet with dew:
Where hast thou been?

MARY.

All through the park and garden.
Oh, never mind my hair! Oh, Anne, the spring
Is come again: the hollow dingle path
Is soft with the swelling moss, all starry green;
And by the old oak roots, the freckled primroses
Are starting up: the golden crocus points,
Like to a goodly rank of fairy spears,
Are peering up behind the close box borders;

And the snowdrops rang their silver bells at me
As I ran past. Here are some violets—
A handful that I gathered as I came
Along the hawthorn hedge: delicious creatures!

ANNE.

How you kiss them, child! Why, one would think
they were
Your lover.

MARY.

I should like so sweet an one.
Venus' fair Adonis, nor the youth
Who died beside the brook wherein he gazed,
Were not made into flowers one half so sweet.
You know, Anne, you are married, and can tell
Better than I can guess what manner of love
One bears one's husband: for mine own good part,
I cannot fancy that I e'er shall like
Any man alive so well as I like my brother,
Or any life so much as this I lead—
In the sunny walks, among the flower-plots,
Where I am free to run, sing, laugh, and play,
With my good friends the birds and butterflies.
But you do n't like the country.

ANNE.

Yes I do ;
I like it better than I did at first ;

I see more things here than I did at first ;
I look more at them, too ;—a rosy sunset,
Or a bright morning, now begins to be
As good as a city pageant to me ; and I grow
To like the converse of all silent things—
Of trees and flowers, and wandering waters sweet,
Of lights and shadows, Nature's visitors,
Which come and make society in solitude,
To cheer us.

MARY.

Yes, you 're growing more to like it ;
Yet methinks you 'd rather be in London,
Leading your city life.

ANNE.

I was bred up to it.

MARY.

And I to this : and each loves best her own ;
Yet in some sort, I can feel how it is with you—
You are so beautiful, dear Anne ; 't is natural,
Most natural, that you should love to be
Where you can draw all eyes to wait on you.
You talk well, too, and those who do so love
Fit audience to applaud.

ANNE.

No, not to applaud,
But to respond.

MARY.

Alas ! I cannot do so,
I have no wit ; yet Heaven knows I love you.
I am not worthy to be your companion.

ANNE.

Fie ! speak not thus ; you make me blush, dear Mary.
You are a fit companion for an angel.

MARY.

But then, my brother is your husband, Anne,
And he can understand and prize you fully ;
And he loves you dearly, and admires you well,
And thinks you excellent above all women.
Does not his company make up for all
You left i' the merry town ?

ANNE.

Is your brother merry ?

MARY.

No, in himself he's grave enough, I grant you ;
But then, why do n't you make him laugh ?

ANNE.

I can 't.

MARY.

Oh yes, you could ! I do, whene'er I see him.

ANNE.

Yes, and I often wonder how you dare.

MARY.

How I dare ! why, one would think, to hear you,
You were afraid of your good husband, Anne.

ANNE.

Well, so I am—I am afraid of him.

MARY.

Afraid of him ! the gentlest soul alive !
Afraid of him !

ANNE.

Aye, aye, 't is easy, dear,
For you to speak thus, who have known him always,
And grown up on his knee : you 're like some child
Bred in a mountain land, and running boldly
Where others fear to stand. Come, sit down here,
And while you twist your flower-wreath I 'll tell you
After what fashion I was married, and then
You 'll see I have some cause for what I say.

MARY.

A story, oh a story ! Kiss, me, good girl
Well now—and so ?

ANNE.

You know, my mother died
When I was but a little toddling thing ;
My father loved me with that passionate love
That mostly grows where the heart has but one channel
In which to pour itself. He was very wealthy,
And nobly born, and proud, and I was nursed
In the bosom of all stateliness and splendour.

MARY.

That's why you look so proud and queenly, love :
Do n't laugh, your pride becomes you infinitely.

ANNE.

Indeed ! I did not know that I was proud.
As I grew a woman I was daily taught
That I was fair, and should be great and powerful ;
And at the court, and in the city revels,
Whene'er I went abroad, a smiling crowd
Came round me, full of ready courtesy
And flattering worship, and my heart was full
With the bright sunshine of prosperity,
And took delight in all things.

MARY.

Had you many suitors ?

ANNE.

Yes, Mary, many ; though I was very young,
Scarce sixteen.

MARY.

Did you fancy none of them ?

ANNE.

Yes—no—I scarcely know.

MARY.

You will not tell.

ANNE.

I would tell you if I could tell myself.
My father was ambitious for me, and hoped,
I know, to see me favour one of them,
For marrying him I should have been a countess.

MARY.

Oh ! would you like to have been a countess, Anne ?

ANNE.

Yes, I suppose I should.

MARY.

Why did n't you marry him ?

ANNE.

He never asked me : he was one of those
Who, under the sharp flail of my misfortunes,
Prov'd light and flew away.

MARY.

What sorry chaff !

How very strange !

ANNE.

No, love, that is not strange ;
'T is you who are strange, and true, and lovely.

MARY.

Go on—and so—

ANNE.

Suddenly a claim was made
By some far distant kinsman of our house,
Who had been long in foreign lands, to a share—
A large share of my father's best estates.

MARY.

Was the claim rightful ?

ANNE.

Many thought it so,
And we were on the brink of being spoiled,
When your brother—

MARY.

Yes, my brother took your cause
And won it for you; I have heard that story.
So then you married him?

ANNE.

'T was strange enough,
That he, so grave, so silent, and so thoughtful,
Should e'er have fallen to loving such an one;
But so it was; and my father growing sick,
Full gratefully resigned me to the hands
Of this good guardian. My poor father died,
And then this strange relation became heir
To all th' estates which I had thought were mine;
He became heir, too, to the friends and lovers
That waited, as I found, on them, not me.
Suddenly I was left alone in the world,
And still your brother loved me, and at last,
He was so kind to me, I married him.

MARY.

Well, are you sorry for it?

ANNE.

What a question?
I do but wish that he were oftener with us.
He's always busy; I scarce feel I know
Aught of him, save that he is very good to me.

MARY.

He's good to every thing ! Are you happy, then ?

ANNE.

Yes, happy ; yes, quite happy, certainly.

[*Clock strikes.*

MARY.

Hark ! it is noon, and here's my brother come.

[*Enter WINTHROP.*

WINTHROP.

Good morrow, dear ! good morrow, my sweet wife !

How has the morning sped, my mistresses ?

Why, Mary, thou art glowing like a rose ;

Thou hast been out : wert thou along with her, sweet ?

ANNE.

No, I can't walk, you know ; it wearies me.

And Mary skims the sward like a young greyhound,

And laughs at me because I am so slow.

WINTHROP.

Ne'er heed her, wench ; we'll teach thee e'er we've done,
To walk six miles ere breaking of thy fast.

What hast thou done with the time ? wrought at the
loom ?

Let's see—why Mary, why, should she go forth?
See, here's a garden growing 'neath her fingers,
More perfect than the real flowers they mimic.

MARY.

No doubt, for nothing natural is perfect.

WINTHROP.

My little Socrates! here's a carnation
Might almost cheat my nose at Christmas-tide,
Whilst in an hour, these buds that thou hast gathered
Shall be trod underground, withered and pale.

MARY.

Yet you love best these children of the mould
For that very cause, that they shall fade and die.
Secure possession of mere mortal good
Would prove no blessing could it last for ever.
In its frail tenure lies its richest worth.
We love that most, we mostly fear to lose,
And the precious things of life are those that perish.
Is it not so?

WINTHROP.

How wise thou art this morning!

MARY.

But is it not so?

WINTHROP.

It seems as tho' it were !
Wife, you make roses better than the spring ;
I would my work were of such pleasant sort !

ANNE.

Have you had much hard work to do this morning ?
Are you weary ?

WINTHROP.

Till I saw you, dear, I was.

MARY.

Come, let me kiss the cobwebs from thy brain.
Look here, Anne, how this daffodil becomes him,
Stuck in his doublet. Here, I'll put another
In your hat for you—why, now you're beautiful !

WINTHROP.

Out, madcap ! Wife, we must tame this saucy girl.
Shall we shut her up, or seek a husband for her ?

MARY.

Oh, shut me up ! pray shut me up, dear brother !
I'll take the prison very patiently,
So you leave out the jailer.

WINTHROP.

Very well ;

We shall see anon ; I expect from town to-morrow
Two of our first gallants—Master James Forrester
And the Lord Alford. When you see these gentlemen,
Perhaps you 'll change your mind.

ANNE.

Lord Alford, said you ?

WINTHROP.

Aye, do you know him ?

ANNE.

I did know him once,
A little—and very long ago. He has broken
More hearts, they say, than any man in England.

MARY.

Thank Heaven, so fine a gentleman can scarce
Think my heart worth the breaking !

WINTHROP.

To speak truth,
Report talks loudly of him in such praises
As I would rather he deserved than I.
But that I know you, wenches, to be such

As honest Englishwomen should be, I
Might not so well have liked his Lordship's visit.
He comes on business tho', and while he's here,
You'll entertain him as becomes yourselves,
And my dear wife and sister.

MARY.

Sure their worships
Will soon be gone; they'll find us but dull company.

[Enter a Servant.]

SERVANT.

Your dinner waits, sir.

WINTHROP.

Come, wife, do you hear;
Leave planting of your flowers—the dinner waits.

MARY.

And what's the other—Master Forrester?

WINTHROP.

I do not know him; you shall find that out,
And with a woman's eye, sharp as her needle,
Spy all his qualities in half an hour.

MARY.

Will you take my word for him, then?

WINTHROP.

Assuredly.

MARY.

Very good ! A pretty book you give me here ;
But I shall spell it through, or I'm mistaken.
For, court or country, still a man's a man.

WINTHROP.

That's very true ; and to one wise as thou art
I' the curious study of mankind——

MARY.

Flout on.

All their ill gifts I know in knowing thee ;
And whatsoe'er in other men appears,
That's not in thee, may be set down for good.
Thou art a judge, yet, by my word, thy judgment
Touching this gentleman shall wait on mine.

WINTHROP.

Content, my small Minerva ! Come, wife, come.

[*Exeunt.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE 1.

The garden of WINTHROP'S house.

Enter MARY and JAMES FORRESTER.

MARY.

And so you never heard of the flower-angels ?

JAMES.

Never ! Are you one of them ?

MARY.

Oh ! you are mocking me.

JAMES.

Believe me, no ; but, for whene'er I see you,
Be 't morn or eve, mid noon or starry night,
A flower still hangs on your breast or in your hand :
I thought perhaps you were a flower-angel.

MARY.

No, truly ; but they 're always near about me.

JAMES.

What are they ?

MARY.

Happy sprites, whose charge it is
To walk unseen about all garden paths,
And live in the fragrant neighbourhood of flowers.
No bud or blossom but hath such a keeper ;
In dim, damp wood, or on wide windy common,
By loneliest marsh, where'er a flower may blow,
Nursed in close gardens of man's fashioning,
Or sown by that wandering seedsman, the free air,
These angels haunt : the maid that on her casement
Sets a flower-pot, hath one still watching there,
And she that wears a blossom in her vest
Keeps a good spirit hovering o'er her breast.
I make you smile : this is not city talk.

JAMES.

Give me that rose you wear—for I believe
Partly in what you say—so give it me,
That I may have an angel near to me.

MARY.

So you take mine from me—well, 'tis no matter.

JAMES.

Alas ! you do not need such guardianship.
But when this fades, then whither goes the sprite ?

MARY

I do not know ; I ne'er did think of that—
Perchance to some new-blown bud of the same kind.

JAMES.

My angel then will leave me. I could wish
To have some flower growing ever near me,
That should live as long as I did—some sweet flower
Whose loveliness and bloom should last my days,
And whose good angel should be mine till death.
Know you of any such ?

MARY.

No, sir, of none.
The dews begin to fall,—'tis growing evening.
Shall we go in ?

JAMES.

Oh ! 'tis not evening yet :
The air is warm and balmy, and the light
Is bright on all the tree stems yet, dear Mary.

MARY.

Nay, but look yonder, how the sober sky
Hath suited all itself in modest grey ;
And see, where the moon uplifts her pearly brow
Over that soft brown cloud.

JAMES.

Ay, but look yonder,
On my side of the garden, gentle mistress;
The western heaven is full of rosy light,
And on yon slope where the fallow deer stand grazing,
How red the sunset falls !

MARY.

Look at the shadows :
They are very long.

JAMES.

They will grow longer, Mary,
And night will come, and after it to-morrow,
When I must go from hence.

MARY.

Shall we go in ?

JAMES.

One moment stand beneath this blossoming tree,
That drops its snowy stars upon thy head,
And let me, while I yet am at thy side,
Gaze on this happy place that I must leave.

MARY.

Nay, speak not thus : these melancholy words,
And the stealing twilight, fill my heart with sadness.
Must you indeed begone ?

JAMES.

I must indeed.

The business I came hither to despatch
Is all accomplished, all things quite cleared up :
One blessed week has passed like one short day,
And all is over.

MARY.

I am sorry.

JAMES.

What?

What are you sorry for?

MARY.

That you must go.

Shall you never come again?

JAMES.

Will you give me leave

To come again?

MARY.

Oh yes, most gladly !

JAMES.

Mary,

We are not speaking to each other truly.

The words that from thy innocent lips I draw

Might seem to some men warrant of a hope
Which yet I have not; for I know thy thought
Touches not mine.

MARY.

I do not understand you.
I'm very sorry you must go—I would
Your cause had been much harder to unravel.
Then you had stayed here longer; I'd have shown you,
Then, other walks and favourite paths of mine,
And we should have seen the roses bloom together.
What is the matter that you cover your eyes
And sigh so?—have I vexed you, Master Forrester?

JAMES.

Hush, hush, thou fairy! this is all too much!
Oh, lay this little hand upon my breast,
And feel the tempest thou hast wrought in me.

MARY.

You frighten me! Oh, pray let go my hand!
'Tis evening now, quite evening—let's go in.

JAMES.

Mary, my heart's bursting, I must speak it all.
Mary, I love you—O maiden, words can't utter
How much I love you! Oh no, do not leave me!
Don't tremble: dost thou fear me, I who'd give
My soul to save thee from the smallest harm?

MARY.

Let me go to my brother! Sir, this is not well;
You—you—you should not have said this to me.
I can scarce breathe or stand.

JAMES.

Oh, sit down here!

I will not breathe another word of love;
Forgive me, but for pity's sake stay here.
Do n't fear; I will not touch thy hand, I will not
E'en sit beside thee. May I stand here, Mary?

MARY.

Yes, sir.

JAMES.

The moonlight shines into your eyes,
And makes them look like two soft streams of light.
Listen! far down in the dusk, from yonder thickets,
What sound is that?

MARY.

It is the nightingale:

Is it not sweet?

JAMES.

Most melancholy sweet!

Yet oh! not half so sweet as thy sweet voice.

MARY.

I 'm better now, so pray let us go in.

JAMES.

Shall your brother know of all this secret talk?
Shall I tell it him, and ask him if he 'll give you
To me to be my wife? Speak Mary, shall I?

MARY.

Ask what thou wilt; I will stay here no longer.

[*Exit.*

JAMES.

For mercy's sake do n't leave me! She is gone;
Like some light vision of unearthly beauty,
She's vanished! but the charm she shed around
Remains. O blessed sward her feet have pressed,
Be ever green! Thou happy, happy mound
That didst receive her beauteous form, may flowers
Cover thee sweetly all the live-long summer!
And thou, delicious curtain of fresh blossoms,
May the autumn crown thee with a glorious bearing!
Ye lovely ministrants to man's delight,
That seem so full of kindly sympathy
With human joy, a lover's blessing on ye!
And be this place for ever hallowed ground,
First left by winter, by the summer's sun first found!

[*Exit.*

SCENE 2.

A room in WINTHROP'S house.

ANNE and ALFORD *playing at chess* ; WINTHROP *reading*.

ALFORD.

Fair Mistress Winthrop, you're too hard for me.

WINTHROP (*aside*).

I'm glad of it.

ANNE.

Your lordship is not playing
As though you meant to win : I fear you spare me.
Pray play in earnest, sir !

ALFORD.

Shall I do so,
And win of you ?

ANNE.

But that I did not fear
The chance of losing, sir, I had not played.
Pray show your strength ; I'm bent to conquer you.

ALFORD.

That were an easier matter than you think,
Perhaps, fair mistress.

ANNE.

I crave your lordship's pardon,
I did not hear you.

ALFORD.

'Tis no matter, madam ;
You had not heeded had you heard, perchance,
And that had been worse—your moves are very cautious.

WINTHROP.

Your lordship's not a foe to trifle with ;
She's right.

ANNE.

This game is mine, for a crown.

ALFORD.

Indeed !

(*Aside*)—The other game is mine, I think, though.

[*Enter a Servant.*

SERVANT.

Mistress,

Here is a dame come up from the village, craves
To speak a word with you.

ANNE.

Oh, 't is Dame Ingle, husband ;
I bade her come, and promised her, moreover,
Her husband's pardon.

WINTHROP (*to the Servant*).

You may go away.

[*Exit Servant.*]

I'm sorry for it, wife.

ANNE.

Sorry for what?

Why, 't is but closing of your book a minute,
And writing out the man's dismissal.

WINTHROP.

Nay,

You promised him his pardon, and you must give it.

ANNE.

Why, sir, you jest; I promised it, indeed,
Because I knew that you would give it.

WINTHROP.

You should not

Have promised for another, Anne.

ANNE.

Pshaw! nonsense!

'T is hard indeed if my credit may not reach
To such a point as this!

WINTHROP.

Perhaps it is;

But it may not.

ANNE.

What do you mean, Judge Winthrop?

WINTHROP.

That you have promised what you cannot do.

ANNE.

No ; but you can.

WINTHROP.

Indeed, I cannot.

ANNE.

How !

Cannot !—cannot set a man free from gaol,
Who's there by your own warrant ! You will not,
You should have said.

WINTHROP.

I'll say it, then—I will not
Nay, Anne, ne'er frown, nor look so scornfully :
I will not, and I cannot break the laws,
By whose just doom this man is cast in prison.
D'ye think I make the statutes I enforce ?
Nay, I am but their voice—the parchment sheet
In which they are set down, that shows them forth.

ANNE.

Ne'er tell me, sir, but you have power enough
To do this thing, if you were minded to it.

What ! the first man in the shire, Judge Winthrop,
Not able to let a man go free from gaol ?

WINTHROP.

Neither to send him thither nor take him thence
Have I the power —were I the king of England,
I could not do it. Thank Heaven ! 't is no man's will
Can touch the free life of an Englishman, —
Nought but the sovereign laws—nor take from any,
The meanest soul alive in all this land,
One tittle of his precious liberty.
You have mistook the matter.

ANNE.

What shall be done ?
I told the woman I would get him free.

WINTHROP.

You must tell her now you cannot. Be content, wife ;
The man's not worth your care, and where he is,
There he is best.

ANNE.

Nay, but I pledged my word.

WINTHROP.

You were to blame : I cannot help it, Anne.
You need not vex yourself about the woman ;
I'll have her looked to well.

ANNE.

No doubt you will ;
But, sir, that 's not the point. Must I go tell her,
Judge Winthrop will not make my promise good ,
He has refused me?— shall I have no more
Account made of my prayer than the next dame,
Who comes from quarrelling on market-day
To have her matters righted by his worship?

WINTHROP.

Your prayer is of no more account than hers,
But of the same, Anne, and shall meet from me
With the self-same justice. Unto her and you,
And every one, I would deal righteously.

ANNE.

Have I, your wife, no other privileges?

WINTHROP.

Yes, many—folded in the private chamber
Of my heart and home ; none on the judgment-bench,
Or in the court, wife.

ANNE.

Shall this be believed?

WINTHROP.

Come, you have left his lordship long enough,
Pondering his next move ;—get you to your game.
I will go speak to the woman ; where is she ?

ANNE.

In the oak parlour, sir, I bade them put her.

WINTHROP.

Very well ! Go to your game ; and, Anne, remember,
Be charier henceforth of your promises.

[*Exit* WINTHROP.]

ANNE.

I cry you mercy, sir ! Shall we go on ?

ALFORD.

Your leisure is my master, gentle madam.
I'm sorry for the failure of your suit.

ANNE.

O sir, I heed it not.

ALFORD.

A cause so pleaded,
By such an one too, might have won itself.

ANNE.

It matters not at all.

ALFORD.

How many men
Would have died gladly but for half those words !
Madam, I think you are not in your game —
That 's a strange move : will you recall it ?

ANNE.

No, sir ;

I don't recall what I once do.

ALFORD.

Take heed, then,

And play more carefully, or I shall beat you ;
Your king's in check.

ANNE.

Pshaw ! I am blind, I think.

That's better.

ALFORD.

Hardly ; there, you're caught again ;
Check to your king !

ANNE (*rising*).

I cannot play ! I know not
What I am doing ! to be thus refused ;
Before a stranger, too, to have my promise,
Like a child's brag, turned down my throat.

ALFORD.

'Tis pity indeed ! Perhaps, however, madam,
You have already used Judge Winthrop's interest
In these kind of matters. I have known some wives
Who scattered their husband's influence so fast
That they were left adry ; their courtesies
Were spent by their ladies with so free a hand.

ANNE.

'Tis the first favour, sir, I ever asked him,
And thus he answers me.

ALFORD.

The first! O Heaven!
To be thus sued to, and to answer thus!
Your husband, Mistress Winthrop, is a man
Like none that ever lived in the world before.
There be — ay, hundreds — who but for one word
Of lightest bidding, uttered by such lips,
Would leap into the fire.

ANNE.

O sir; but then
One's husband never would be one of these.

ALFORD.

Fatal decree! that still possession dulls
The sense to the owning the most precious treasure:
Yet I had not believed this, but for seeing it.

ANNE.

'Tis hard indeed!

ALFORD.

You, you whom I remember
Absolute queen over so many hearts!

The drooping of whose eyelid might have bid
The lordliest of our court fall down before you
In happy worship of your slightest wish ;
You to be thus refused ! — I crave your pardon ——

ANNE.

O sir, go on ! You saw it, and you may,
And doubtless will, speak what you saw. You'll say
You saw me, like an humbled school-girl, stand
To be tutored about this and t' other word
That I had spoke too much ; to be denied
The suit I asked, and bade take care henceforth
What things I asked for ;—and indeed I will !

ALFORD.

Have patience, madam !—it is true, your husband
Might have more gently put you from your suit,
Answered with something more of courtesy.
Alas ! I can imagine no such grief
As having to deny a prayer of yours.

ANNE.

He does not think so.

ALFORD.

Pardon me, fair mistress—
You must make some allowances for age.
The tender heart, that in that gentle breast

With pity and with kindness throbs towards all things,
Is young enough to have been Judge Winthrop's
daughter's.

Had you but mated your sweet prime of life
With one akin to you in years, you had found
Perchance a happier lot : but you forget,
Time, as it goes, lays ice within our veins,
Which coldly curdles round an old man's heart :
'T is not your husband's fault, but your ill fortune,
That he no more is young.

ANNE.

'T is very true :
'T is an ill thing when opposite seasons meet.

ALFORD.

And opposite ages are like spring and winter ;
'T is the spring suffers always in the encounter,
And the gentler bows to the sterner influence.

ANNE.

My father made this match ; he was his friend.
Oh ! let me think how much he was his friend
Who married me, portionless, friendless !

ALFORD.

Madam !

What is 't you say ? portionless ! Where's the dower
Might with your wealth of beauty hold comparé ?

Portionless! why, the giving of yourself,
Decked as you are with charms not of this earth—
Turn not away, I speak the common words
Of all men, where your name is only uttered—
Was the bestowing of so great a gift,
That, tho' he should make up Methusaleh's years,
He ne'er could pay you for 't. O Heaven! por-
tionless!

The peerless Greek that set the world in arms
Ne'er fired the nations with such matchless beauty.
To look on you alone is happiness,
And he has called you his—his own!

ANNE.

My lord!

ALFORD.

Oh! pardon me, you do not know—you cannot
Ev'n guess—what chords are thrilling in my breast,
That have perforce been silent many a year.
You never knew, and now 't is useless all
That you should know, the hopes, the dreams, the
worship
That once did shrine your image in my heart—
Hopes that had sickened till I thought them dead,
And worship that should now be dumb for ever;—
Yet 't is impossible to hold one's peace
And hear you thus decry your precious self.
Portionless! friendless! If you were thus friendless,

It more became him ne'er to make you look
From him to others who no others have,
To hold his place if he should fail to you.
You have no brother, madam, nor no sister ?

ANNE.

Not one of kin to me in the wide world.

ALFORD.

Yet 't is not so, fair creature ! say thou not
That thou art friendless ; every eye that sees thee,
Each heart that feels thy sovereignty of beauty,
Is friend and servant to thine excellence.
Oh ! honour me with such a blessed title,
And call my life your own.

ANNE.

I thank you, sir :

To-morrow you go hence, never again
To hear my name, or look upon my face.
Your proffers were most kind, could they stead me
aught.

ALFORD.

Yet, oh ! remember them !

ANNE.

Be sure I will ;
And let me pray one thing of you—your silence
On what this evening you have witnessed.

ALFORD.

Madam,

Your will locks that within my lips.

ANNE.

Good night, sir!

Ere you depart to-morrow I shall see you.

ALFORD.

Once more I shall be happy then. Good night,
Sweet lady! and may pleasant dreams wait on you!

[Exit ANNE.]

I would I might but order those same dreams :
'T is wonderful how much is worked by them.
The unconscious reason thrust aside the while,
Feelings and passions oft lay hold of us,
Which, i' the waking hours of soberer judgment,
Were hard withstood : not so in kindly sleep—
The spell lies soft upon the dreaming spirit,
And the foe creeps into the slumbering stronghold,
Whence daylight and its sterner thoughts can't drive it.
Fair Mistress Anne, would I were Morpheus
To-night for your sweet sake! How proud she is!
The tow'r's so high 't will topple of itself;
For wisdom says pride goes before a fall,
And if decreed so, why, I cannot help it.
Bless Mother Ingle! I will pension her,
Though 't were my last groat, for this good night's work.

[Exit.]

SCENE 3.

A terrace before WINTHROP'S house. Night. Enter ANNE.

ANNE.

Into the cool night air; my blood is thick
With a strange melancholy; and in my heart
A fluttering fear beats quick, then dies away
In faint dim longings. What should all this mean?
I'll walk i' the moonlight—it may be the chaste
And solemn light of the starry heavens, together
With the night's cool breathings, shall refresh my spirit.
How bright thou art, ineffable lonely queen,
That rul'st these silent hours! O me! my soul
Melts in thy radiance! All things are at rest.
From the still boughs that sleep beneath thine eye
Faint odours breathe of the green and budding spring;
No smallest sound is heard, but a low rustling
Like the unfolding of the new made leaves.
My husband sleeps; I watched him ere I left him;
A dreamless quiet slumber it did seem,
Like that of a good man.

[*Enter at the back LORD ALFORD.*

I'm glad I woke.

My sleep was much disturbed, and in my dreams
A voice and form arose for evermore,
That seemed to draw my heart away from me;
I'm glad I woke! How sad and fair is night!
How fair were such a night to two who loved,

Standing beneath this loving sky. Ah me!
That mine had been so sweet a lot! Who's there?
O Heaven! Who's there?

ALFORD (*coming forward*).

Start not, fair dame, nor fear.
What, wandering thus a lonely votary
Of the cold queen! Where is your happy husband,
That he thus suffers you to steal away,
To walk through the night a fairer earthly Dian?

ANNE.

How comes your lordship waking at this hour?
I thought the house abed.

ALFORD.

Nay, how come you
At such an hour awake? Alas! my eyes
Refuse to close: my blood within my veins,
Stirred by some unknown passion to and fro,
Gushes and ebbs from my o'erladen heart,
That heaves with smothered sighs. But what make you
With restless wakefulness? You, in whose breast
The sunshine of a calm content doth dwell,
Whose wishes crowned with perfect happiness
Rest in the joy of full accomplishment?

ANNE.

O Heaven! I! —

ALFORD.

Why, you are weeping, sure!
Whence are these crystal tokens?

ANNE.

Sir—my lord—
It is not fit, nor seemly—'t is not well,
That thus in the night we should converse together.

ALFORD.

Why? was it sin when here you stood alone,
Gazing into the heavens, like one dropt from them?
And is it sin that, led by the beauteous night,
And a secret spirit of most blessed chance,
I here have met you? Nay, but if you were one
Not bound in wedlock chain, but gently bent
To hear me plead — if I were one who loved you—
If kneeling thus, thus pressing this white hand,
I prayed your mercy ——

ANNE.

Rise this instant, sir!
You have forgot to whom you speak — forgot
Yourself and me—in this audacious language.

ALFORD.

Pardon, oh, pardon! — on the earth I lie
Prostrate before you. Call your husband hither,

And bid him put his sword into my heart,
But pierce it not with thy more terrible anger.

ANNE.

Hence, ere the night shall waste another second
I may not look upon you once again,
Nor hear you speak another syllable,
Without a deadly sin.

ALFORD.

Forgive—forgive me

[ANNE re-enters the chamber and closes the window;
he remains kneeling as the scene closes.

SCENE 4.

Enter Servants, crossing the stage with trunks.

FIRST SERVANT.

Are they up yet?

SECOND SERVANT.

They should be, for the cock
Crew half an hour ago, and the dawn whitens.
My lord said last night he would be in London
To dinner.

FIRST SERVANT.

He must have good horses then.
Be they saddled all?

SECOND SERVANT.

They are e'en at it now.
The house is only now beginning to stir.
Come, let's go get our breakfast, thou and I,
Ere riding into town. Yonder's the Judge
And Master Forrester; they'll start anon,
And 't is ill riding on an empty stomach.

[*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter JAMES FORRESTER and JUDGE WINTHROP.*]

WINTHROP.

All is concluded, Master Forrester,
And I hope well righted to your brother's wish.
Hereafter, should any troubles visit you,
I shall be glad to straighten matters for you;
Here are the parchments.

JAMES.

Thanks, most worthy sir!
Yet I have still another cause on hand,
Which, more than all, needs your indulgent help.

WINTHROP.

Speak and command me.

JAMES.

I have heard my brother
Speak of you ever as the man in the world
He loved the best, me only set aside.

WINTHROP.

Young sir, your brother is my worthy friend ;
I love him as a brother—I might say
A son, he is most excellent.

JAMES.

Then, sir,
May I think you will not hold me over daring,
If to fulfil a darling wish of his,
And a hope on which my more than life depends,
I ask if you will give to your friend's brother
Your gentle sister?—Good sir ! do but hear me !
That I love her most dearly, oh, believe it !
That she towards me inclines with kindly favour
I dare to think —

WINTHROP.

Why, surely—surely, sir,
You would not have the heart to marry her ?

JAMES.

Sir !

WINTHROP.

Sir, I cannot give that child away !
You might as well ask me for half my heart !
I cannot want her—I can't live without her !

JAMES.

Judge Winthrop, you amaze me ! what, the good,
And self-denying man, who still to all

Deals merciful justice, for the single sake
Of a mere fancied loss, denies his sister
The happiness of a prosperous wedlock, and
Condemns the man who loves her to a life
Of bitterest disappointment ; O sir, hear me !
If, as I hope, your gentle sister loves me—

WINTHROP.

Sir, 't is impossible ! I 'm sure she cannot
Love you ! she oft has sworn to me, she never
Should love a man, to have him for her husband.

JAMES.

Are you married, sir, and do not you yet know
The cunning cloaks a maiden's humour wears
Ere yet her fancy's touched ? Nay, but believe me,
I think I am not over bold, nor vain,
To dream that Mistress Mary heeds my suit.
Send for her, I beseech you, sir, and question her.

WINTHROP.

O Heaven ! this is the way ! a whole dear life
They live upon our knees, and in our arms,
The darlings of our very souls—and lo !
A stranger, passing by, but beckons them,
And straight they turn their back upon their homes,
And make their lodging in a new-found heart.
Oh ! I had dreamt of this—but it is bitter,
Now that 't is come to pass !

JAMES.

Good sir, take comfort !

You shall not lose your sister, but instead,
Gain a true loving brother, and we will live
As near to you—

WINTHROP.

Oh, sir ! for eighteen years,
We 've lived together and asked no man's leave,
And only thanked God for the blessing, sir !
But you are right, for if she marries you,
Henceforth you shall lend me her society,
And I shall thank you for 't ; live near to me !
My heart has been her house for eighteen years,
And every thought a chamber that she dwelt in
Perpetually ! but now, if she lived 'neath my roof,
Sat at my board, slept in the very bed
That held her in her sleep last night, and walked
Each day in her accustomed walks, I tell you,
She would be gone from me—gone from me, sir ;
A husband is a wall that builds itself
Between a woman and all other things.
Like the young bird, in our hedge elm trees here,
Warmed in the nest, he presently drives thence
The ancient brood, who made their proper home there.
If she is married, she is no more mine,
No sister, nor no daughter, but a wife ;
All other names are clean forgot in that
New name—all other loves in that new love.

JAMES.

Well, sir, if she loves me, how shall it stead you
That she still wish she were not where she is,
Nor what she is, but married, and my wife?

WINTHROP.

That's true! poor wench! Pray, sir, have patience with
me!

'Tis something sudden, and you seemed to me
Little more welcome than a thief to a miser.
True—as you say—if she indeed doth love you,
She's gone already beyond all redemption.
Have you spoke of this matter to her yet?

JAMES.

Walking by twilight in the orchard, sir,
Last evening, when I took my leave of her,
My heart unsealed itself.

WINTHROP.

And what said she?

JAMES.

She bade me speak to you.

WINTHROP.

She did?

JAMES.

She did.

WINTHROP.

Within there!

[Enter a Servant.]

Send my sister Mary hither.

[Exit Servant.]

James Forrester, if this be as you think,
If my dear sister loves you, you shall never
Hear another word from me upon this matter.
'Tis woman's nature, Sir, and there's an end on't.
You wrenched my heart something too suddenly,
And I with little wisdom answered you.
You are my dear friend's brother, if you make
My sister happy, I will bless you and love you
Above all men.—Oh! if she love thee, youth,
Treasure thou well the gift she gives to thee:
A gentle, modest, virtuous, loving woman,
Will make thy life on earth a paradise,
And help thee far upon thy way to heaven.
God help me! an it were her burial
I scarce could feel more sadly.

[Enter MARY.]

My sweet Mary!

Give me thy hand, thus do I lay it fast
In his, who asks thee of me for his wife.
Start not, nor blush, nor tremble, nor deny,
But simply, if thou art content to wed him,
Take not thy hand away;—it is enough.

MARY.

Brother !

WINTHROP.

Why what's the matter ? did he hold you
So tight, you could not get your hand away ?

MARY.

No, brother, but—

WINTHROP.

Go—go—go. Hold thy peace !

[MARY and JAMES converse apart.

[*Enter at different doors ANNE and LORD ALFORD.*

Good-morrow, wife. Good-morrow to your lordship !
How did you rest last night ?

ALFORD.

Indifferently, sir :

A night so troubled I shall scarce forget it.

(*Aside.*)

She has not told her husband yet ; good lady !

WINTHROP.

Indeed, I'm sorry for't. Was your lordship sick ?

ALFORD.

Sick to the heart, sir. Gentle Mistress Winthrop,
How fare you in this early hour o' the day ?

Your pillow scarcely will forgive us, that
We draw you from it sooner than your wont.

(Apart to her.)

Have you forgotten and forgiven too?

ANNE.

My lord—I—I—

[Enter a Servant.]

SERVANT.

Your Lordship's horses wait.

ANNE.

Thank Heaven, at last!

WINTHROP.

Before you take your leave,
Here is a piece of business toward, to which
I wish your presence, as true witnesses.
Here be two friends of ours, who have found out
That marrying is a wise and pleasant thing.
Heaven grant they prove it so! to their betrothment
Testify with your best good wishes:—wife,
Go, give my sister joy; and you, my lord,
Pray greet your friend, who is to be my brother.

ALFORD.

Your hand, good James; may marriage be to you,—
What yet I never heard it was to any man.

WINTHROP.

That's a court jest, sir : 'tis above our wits.
In the country, we yet hold the grandam's saw,
That marriage is a state both blest and honourable.

ALFORD.

(*Aside*)—That's as may happen. (*Aloud*)—Good sir,
pardon me !

ANNE (*to MARY*).

May'st thou be happy, dearest child !

MARY.

As happy

As you are, Anne, and I shall be content.

ALFORD.

Umph !

ANNE (*aside*).

Will this end !

WINTHROP.

As for the wedding day,
For that we wait your brother John's return.
I'm sure you would not think yourself well married
Unless he gave you joy. Clear up your brows,
He must be back ere the next month goes by,
And though you must remain in London now,

And Mary here, you 're free to waste between ye,
As much good paper, pen and ink, and horse-shoes
As you shall deem discreet.

JAMES.

A mortal month !

We shall be sundered !

WINTHROP.

Pshaw ! come, come, this parting
Grows sad,—some wine !

[Enter a Servant.]

Your stirrup cup, my lord,
Before you mount,—a bowl of Burgundy,
Well spiced, and warmed, to keep the chill air out ;
And I myself will ride as far with you
As the clump of oaks, where you strike the high road.

ALFORD.

Fair Mistress Winthrop, you 're but ill at ease,
I fear we have disturbed you all too early :
You are pale, I think.

WINTHROP.

That fault is mended now,
Your lordship sees. James Forrester, a word with you.

ALFORD (*aside to ANNE*).

Do not forget me quite ! — I go — no more
To look upon you ; this is Paradise,
And I, a wretch driv'n from its gates for ever !

[*Enter a Servant with a bowl of wine.*

WINTHROP.

Now, wife, give you the morning draught to his
lordship.
What 's the matter ?

ANNE.

Nothing, sir, a careless stumble.

WINTHROP.

That wine 's too good for earth libations, sweet ;
Walk heedfully !

[*ANNE takes the cup to LORD ALFORD ;
he salutes her but does not drink.*

ALFORD.

No wine after that kiss,
I 'm drunk already.

ANNE.

I shall sink with horror !

[*ALFORD giving the cup back to her gives
her a small parcel.*

ALFORD.

(*Aside*)—Hush ! do not let them see this ; but sometimes,
Look on it for my sake with pity. (*Aloud*)—Madam,
We cannot speed but well, by you sent forth,
And by your worthy husband guided hence.

[WINTHROP *takes the cup from ANNE*
and gives it to MARY.

WINTHROP.

Now, Mary, bid James Forrester good speed
Toward London; when he comes this way there 'll be
No need to bid thee speed him with thy wishes.

[MARY *takes the cup and gives it to JAMES.*

MARY.

Farewell ! may you speed quickly back — I mean —
To London !

JAMES (*kisses her cheek*).

Heaven bless and keep you, Mary !

WINTHROP (*after drinking*).

To horse ! to horse ! to brush the morning dew,
And sniff the freshest air o' the day. Come, gentlemen.

[*Exeunt* WINTHROP, FORRESTER, *and* ALFORD.

MARY.

From the terrace we can see them as they ride
Down to the linden trees ; come Anne and watch them.

[*She opens the window and goes out.*

ANNE.

They 're gone at last, and I can breathe!—what's this?
What's this? ah, traitor! dost thou doubt thy art?
Think'st thou the image is not deep enough?
Oh, eyes that have looked through me, do I yet
Behold ye, fatal eyes, that have undone me!
Lips! that the sweetest poison in the world
Have poured into my heart, are ye yet here?
What is 't I do?—O Heaven! what is 't I do?
Am I a wife, and thus stand gazing on
The picture of a man that's not my husband?
Why, I am lost! he must have seen it too;
Seen that I was not true, nor chaste, nor honest.
How did he dare to leave his picture with me!
How did he dare to think I thought of him!
How did he dare!—oh, wherefore, should he not?
What though I bury this down i' the earth,
Smother it up fathoms deep i' the sea,
Oh, what will that avail? he's here, he's here,
Here in the hurried throbbing of my heart,
Here, here within my bosom; God in Heaven!
What will become of me? what shall I do,
When back my husband comes? How shall I look
When he looks on me? How answer him
When he speaks to me? all the live-long day,
How shall I hide my thoughts from him? at night
If I should dream, or utter words in my sleep,
What will become of me?

MARY (*from the terrace*).

What, are you coming, Anne?
I see my brother turning home again.

ANNE.

Oh, horrible!
Hide, hide thee close; O Heaven! it burns my heart.

MARY (*from the terrace*).

I shall run meet him,—will you come along?

ANNE.

Would I might never see his face again!
What did I say?—oh, I am lost for ever!

[*She runs out.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE 1.

The park of JUDGE WINTHROP, early morning.

Enter ANNE and ALFORD.

ANNE.

All 's still as night; come—you may come—come
quickly;

I have spied carefully, there's no one near.

ALFORD.

Thanks, gentle guide! what, art thou turning back?
Wilt thou not walk with me to the orchard wall?

ANNE.

I'm sick with fear! O Alford, get thee gone!
Hark! what was that?

ALFORD.

Nothing; why how you tremble!
A bird stirred in its sleep among the boughs.
Why, how your heart is beating, and the blood
All ebbing from your cheeks!

ANNE.

This is the joy of guilt!
For mercy's sake, begone!—the light is breaking
In the east. See, there's a shadow moving yonder.

ALFORD.

Oh, you see shadows where there's nothing, love.

ANNE.

'Tis very like; my eyes are full of fear.

ALFORD.

What should'st thou fear when I am near thee, sweet?

ANNE.

Everything—you—myself—my husband—God.
You laugh because I said that I feared God;
Yet oh, 'tis true! I fear His dreadful justice;
It will o'ertake us yet—be sure it will!

ALFORD.

Why, thou'rt some pretty puritan, and not
The gallant lady that Lord Alford loves.

ANNE.

Do you love me yet? is't possible you do?
You will not love me long—you will forsake me;
What will become of me when you are weary of me!

ALFORD.

Fie! speak not thus! whene'er I love thee not,
I live not either. Come, cheer up, my love,
And look upon me brightly ere I go.

ANNE.

I know you do not love me as you used.
You come less often, and you stay less long;
You jest now when I weep, and you grow angry
When I sigh, as I must do whene'er I think:
Oh no, no, no: you will not love me long,
And then what shall I do?—then I must die!

ALFORD.

Pshaw! if I come less oft, or stay less long,
'Tis that you now for ever wear a face
Of discontent and mortified repentance;
As if the loving me were such a baseness
As would degrade you.

ANNE.

Oh, my heart is breaking!
You cannot, and you will not understand me.

ALFORD.

I do not understand these wintry looks,
And these eternal self-upbraidings, madam. [Going.

ANNE.

O heav'ns! you're angry! Do not leave me thus.

ALFORD.

Nay, but I thought my presence might disturb you.
I know not how thou art when I am hence,
But when I'm here, you've nought but lamentations.

ANNE.

I'll tell thee how I am when thou art hence.
The very moment that mine eyes lose sight of thee,
Horrible darkness falls upon my life.
One dismal, dreary winter spell comes o'er me,
And save for a dim and dreamy sense of shame
And terror that for ever dogs my steps,
I seem no more alive;—each word, each look
Makes the guilty red roll hotly to my brows;
I wake all night, weeping, till I grow sick;
And if my heavy eyelids drop, I rise,
And like a wicked spirit walk about,
For fear lest I should sleep, and dream, and speak.
Look at me, Alford! Do you see my eyes,
How dim they look, and how my cheeks are fading?
You cannot love the thing I am becoming.

ALFORD.

(*Aside*)—There's truth in that. (*Aloud*)—Oh, is it
not yourself
That have grown weary of our sweet communion?
You do but jest to say that I am changed.
You do not love me any more.

ANNE.

O Heaven!

What shall I do? Alas! what's left to do,
To prove my mad love for thee? Nothing—nothing

ALFORD.

Yes, there is something yet, sweet Anne, to do.

ANNE.

Say what. I'll buy thy gratitude at least ;
That may outlive thy waning fancy. What ?

ALFORD.

I have been playing deep, and am a loser
Of heavy ventures. I am sore beset.

ANNE.

I have no money.

ALFORD.

But your husband—

ANNE.

What ?

Shall my husband's purse as well as—oh, no, no !
You do not mean—you're not in earnest—you—
You do but jest—it is impossible !

ALFORD.

Unless I have to-night seven hundred pounds,
To-morrow I shall bid adieu to England.
I will not live to be lackeyed at the heels
By ragged rascals, clamouring for their dues ;
I will begone—

ANNE.

Whither ?

ALFORD.

In Italy

Life's pleasant, or in France, and I will thither.

ANNE.

And what shall I do ?

ALFORD.

Oh, make friends with your husband.

ANNE.

I was proud once !

ALFORD.

Hark ! I hear footsteps coming.

If I should never see you more—

ANNE.

O God !

ALFORD.

Farewell—

[*Going.*

ANNE.

What ! Are you going thus ! For ever !

I will ask for the money, Alford,—yes, I will !

ALFORD.

I know for certain, that Judge Winthrop means
To go from home for some few days, to-night.
In a few hours hence I will again be with you,
Thanks, gentle friend ! farewell ! but not for ever.

[*Exit.*]

ANNE.

My body's honour, and my soul's salvation,
My peace of mind here, and heaven's joys hereafter,
All, all are gone ! for what ? Why, he despises me.
He's used me for his pleasure, and he now
Will use me for his profit, for his purse.
He loves me not !—he soon will grow to loathe me ;
For where we wrong, there do we oftenest hate,
And presently he'll leave me, throw me by ;
He'll never come again, nor ever think of me,
But with an inward sneer ; perhaps, he'll brag
Of how he found Judge Winthrop's lady easy,
And make a ribald table tale of me !
I shall go mad !

[*Enter MARY.*]

What, Mary, are you there ?

Have you been walking ? I've been up, and stirring,
With the early bees ; you see I mend apace :
The morning was so fair, and—and—my spirits
So light and joyful, that I thought I'd try

How the dewy air of the grey hours tasted ; and—
I came to walk—

[*Enter* WINTHROP.

MARY.

Why, here 's a miracle !

Why, brother, here 's our Lady Runaway
Turned handmaid to the early morning star,—
First gentlewoman of Aurora's bed-chamber,
And blushing as her mistress.

WINTHROP.

How now, wife !

What, truant, what ! steal from me as I slept ?
What shall I think hath lured thee from my bed ?
Why, were I jealous, such unwonted wakefulness
Might make me doubt—

ANNE.

Doubt, sir ! you—you—you could not.

WINTHROP.

What, will you answer me in earnest now ?
Yea then, I swear, I saw you meet the man,
And—

ANNE.

Sir !

WINTHROP.

And part from him—

ANNE.

Ha! ha! ha! ha!

How merry is my husband this fair morning,
To jest so much ere breaking of his fast!

MARY.

Nay, but I find you merrier than your wont;
Do you not notice, brother, in her eyes
An unaccustomed brightness, and a colour
More red than usual in her cheeks?

ANNE.

Why sure,
You would not have me rise at such an hour
For nothing? Why, the profit's to our beauty,
If, ere the sun gets up, we cheerly leave
Our dreaming beds, and to the early light,
And the fresh air, and sparkling dews of morning,
Commend our faces; what—you see your homilies
Are not lost on me; I can chatter, too,
On wholesome exercises and good hours;
Perhaps you thought that, being city-bred,
I was incapable of all this wisdom?

MARY.

I scarcely thought thee apt at so much mirth;
I do not know thee.

ANNE.

'T is the morning sun,
Hath touched my forehead, and upon my spirits
Worked a brisk spell.

WINTHROP.

Why, be it what it will,
That to thy heart brings but one pleasant fancy,
It has my thanks; for still thy mirth is mine,
Thy pleasure and thy joy my best content,
And what does thee a good does me a thousand.

ANNE.

(*Aside*)—O Heaven! (*Aloud*)—Come, I must test your
love a little;
I—no—I will not.

WINTHROP.

What's the matter, wench?

ANNE.

I thought to have asked you, since your love's so great.
A proof of it.

MARY.

Now shall I learn to wheedle

WINTHROP.

Learn ! oh you're perfect all of ye in that ;
Dame Nature, in your very swaddling clothes,
Teaches ye that. Come, now, what is it, wife ?

ANNE.

I fear you will deny me.

WINTHROP.

Nothing, sweet,
That lies within my compass. What ?

ANNE (*aside*).

My eyes

Are filling fast with tears ; I shall betray myself.

WINTHROP.

Come, Anne, take heart, — do I deserve this pause ?

MARY.

I would not bargain so to tax thy love.

ANNE.

No, you've no need. I—I would have some money,—
Sir—husband—I have need of such a sum
As I most fear to name—seven hundred pounds !

MARY.

Wilt thou build churches ? This is wonderful !

ANNE.

Pray do not question me for what I want this;
Pray do not say one word but yea or nay;
Say no, I cannot have it,—say so quickly!

WINTHROP.

Wife, you can have it; I have more than that
Now in my hands, and it is freely yours.
I do not ask you anything, but when
You please to tell me how you need this money,
I shall be glad to know it. Hitherto
I have not known you wasteful or unthrifty;
I'll think you have good cause for what you ask,
And mean to put it to some worthy use.

ANNE.

This is too much! I will not take it, no.

WINTHROP.

Peace, peace, 't is yours. Here is the key of my chest,
Take that thou find'st therein, it will not reach
To full seven hundred pounds, but go to my steward,
And bid him pay the rest to thee. I know
It is to do some holy act of charity,
Which shall buy blessings out of heaven for us,
That thou desirest this; it could not be
Else that thou wert so close;—give me a kiss!

For I must ride from home some twenty miles,
And shall not see thee for a day and night,
So bid me speed.

MARY.

Why, Anne, what is the matter?
You're growing deadly pale.

ANNE.

Oh, stay at home!
Good husband, stay at home, to-day, at least!
Oh, I beseech thee do not go away!
No, do not go from home by any means!

WINTHROP.

Why, this is stranger than all things beside!
Not go from home! not do my duty, Anne!
'T is not the first time that I have been called
Unwillingly enough, for a space to leave thee,
But never yet have I been stayed with tears,
And wringing hands.

ANNE.

Pray, do not go! pray, do not!

MARY.

Why say, what is it? Hast thou dreamt of him?
Ill chances on the road? Did the death-watch tick?
Or did your woman break a glass last night?

ANNE.

Well, I am mad ! yet, husband, do not go !

WINTHROP.

Pray, Anne, don't try my virtue in this fashion.
'Tis hard enough still to be called away
From you and home, by matters that in nothing
Touch my own heart ; but thus to have thee sue,
And hang about me, and weep over me,
Why, 't is enough to melt a man's soul out of him.

ANNE.

I cannot help it. What, can you not stay ?

WINTHROP.

So little, that the hour is even now
When I must mount my horse ; come, walk with me
To the gate.

ANNE.

Will you not stay ?

WINTHROP.

I cannot, Anne.

ANNE (*aside*).

'T was the last hope, and I had clutched at it
In vain !

MARY.

Oh, come ! I see 't is I must play the hero,
And swear to guard you well till he comes home.
There shall no thief come in at our door, nor lover
At our windows, brother, and so go in peace ;
I will look to your loving wife the while.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE 2.*A tavern in LONDON.*

WILTON, MOWBRAY, and others discovered at dice.

MOWBRAY.

Who saw him last ?

WILTON.

Whom ?

MOWBRAY.

Why, the pattern man ;
The eleventh commandment, by which people live
In London ; the Lord Alford.

WILTON.

Bless him !

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

Three days since
I met with him, passing through Austin Friars

He was in grave talk with an Israelite ;
I feared for the poor circumcised rascal ;
I thought he was no match for the gentleman.

WILTON.

Well, well, revenges will be had some day,
And justice comes, though she be long a-coming.
They say he's steep'd in debts to the very lips ;
An I were his creditor, I'd be like him i' the Bible,
And hold him by the throat till all were paid.

MOWBRAY.

His estates are laden with more mortgages
Than his oaks bear apples ; yet he ruffles it
For ever like a pageant through the town,
And his need seems costlier than most men's wealth.

WILTON.

He hath means, sir, easy means.

MOWBRAY.

Hush, Wilton !

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

What,

What means hath his lordship ?

WILTON.

Oh, the devil knows !

Not I.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

Why, he's kept by half a score
Of loving ladies who have loving lords;
He borrows from their husbands several ways;
He will not starve till he grows old or ugly.
Yonder he comes——

WILTON.

Then I'll begone. I love not
To handle dice in his lordship's company.

[*Exit* WILTON.]

[*Enter* LORD ALFORD.]

ALFORD.

Good morrow, lads! Ha, still at the old work!
Who's winning, and who's losing? Come, I'll be
One of ye. Here be good seven hundred pounds
I mean to lose, or double, presently.

MOWBRAY.

That's well, for Jew, or mistress! I will go
Shares in your lordship's luck.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

Then George and I
Shall be your adversaries:—now, my lord.

ALFORD.

Who saw James Forrester to-day?—so—so—
An excellent cast.

MOWBRAY.

I did; in merry humour,
Going to meet his brother, the new baronet.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

I do not see we touch that bag of gold yet :
Your lordship has a spell for the dice, I think.

ALFORD.

Certainly, sir, I have. So Sir John Forrester
Comes home to-day, does he ?

MOWBRAY.

E'en now he should be landing.

ALFORD.

What manner of man is he ?—like James ?

MOWBRAY.

Not much :

Graver, and less acquainted with the world ;
A scholar, and a single-hearted man,
Of excellent dispositions.

ALFORD.

Is he married ?

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

Oh, no ! he never found that perfect lady
That he could love, they say.

ALFORD.

Indeed ! There's the last cast :
That finishes the game ;—good sirs, you're conquered.
I beg your pardon humbly. Well, this gentleman,
He's got this title lately ?

MOWBRAY.

Aye—and with it
A fat round revenue of thirteen thousands
Per year.

ALFORD.

That's too much for a bachelor.
(*Aside*)—I would I might but once get hold of him,
Easy, and rich, he were an income to me ;
Teaching such fools experience, we do give them
Their money's worth—wisdom, that pearl of price,
For what all wise men are agreed is trash.

[*Enter Servants, carrying in trunks, &c. Enter*

SIR JOHN and JAMES FORRESTER.

JOHN.

No, no, I will not set my foot again
Upon that most uneasy cradle. James,
See thou to the rest ; I'm no more for the water,
My head is rocking yet ; I'll keep the ground,
The new-found earth, for a little while.

JAMES.

I go,
And straight am back to you,—oh, welcome friend !
Dear brother, welcome !

[*Exit.*

MOWBRAY.

Welcome home again,
Worthy Sir John.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

Good sir, I greet you well !

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

You're very welcome back to England, sir !

JOHN.

Thank you, good gentlemen ! your courtesy
Is very gratefully received by me :
And 't is a happiness indeed, once more,
To hear the pleasant tongue my mother spoke,
And grasp an Englishman again by the hand.

ALFORD.

May I take leave to bid you welcome, sir,
To your own country ; wealthier, and more noble,
In the world's common use of speech ; but neither
To those who knew your worth and true nobility.

FORRESTER.

Lord Alford, as I think ?

ALFORD.

The same.

FORRESTER.

My lord,

Your speech would make me blush, but that I know
'Tis a mere fashion thus to praise demerit,
And courtesy, rather than truth, is thanked for it.

ALFORD.

Sir, I have long desired much to know you.

FORRESTER.

Your lordship does me honour.

ALFORD.

Not a whit;

Myself much pleasure. Shall we sit, good sir?
They may be tedious landing of your goods,
You're doubtless weary?

FORRESTER.

Why, I thought I was,
Till from the main into the river's course,
Swoll'n with the briny mingling of the sea,
We turned our prow; then, as the morning broke
Upon the narrowing stream, and from each shore
Up drew the misty curtains of the night,
My senses, challenged by each several object

Of welcome sight and sound, and smell of land,
Grew brisk and wakeful; and the kindly greeting
That met me here has given me rest already,
Refreshing me with pleasure and content.

MOWBRAY.

We'll take our leave awhile; hereafter, sir,
We shall be proud to wait upon your leisure.

[Exeunt MOWBRAY and Gentlemen.]

ALFORD.

Methinks good Master James has a long task;
How shall we waste the time? Oh! here be dice—
D'ye play?

FORRESTER.

No, pardon me, I have not touched
A die for many years.

ALFORD.

Rare abstinence! a vow, perhaps?

FORRESTER.

Even so, my lord, a vow. When but a boy,
I threw, and won at once so large a stake,
That I thought the devil must be bribing me
To an ill course: and though so much the gainer,
I never since have given him leave to tempt me.

ALFORD.

(*Aside*)—This is some man come from before the flood :
Who ever heard the like? (*Aloud*)—Oh! you're to
blame,

I find these little squares rare playfellows ;
Your brother loves them well.

FORRESTER.

I fear, too well.

[LORD ALFORD *drops the dice ; in stooping to pick
them up a picture falls from his dress ;* SIR
JOHN FORRESTER *picks it up.*

You have dropped something, sir ; how beautiful! —
Pray pardon me, my lord.

ALFORD.

Nay, look at it

As much as you will: d'ye think it fair?

FORRESTER.

Oh, rare!

Most rare! you must forgive me, my good lord,—
Is there indeed a woman like to this?
Or is 't a cunning sport of the painter's fancy?
It were great happiness to dream this face.

ALFORD.

Sir, 't is no dream, but an indifferent copy
Of a lady's face, whom I am well acquainted with.

FORRESTER.

You know her?

ALFORD.

Very well.

FORRESTER.

And is it possible
She is as fair as this?

ALFORD.

As much more fair
As life to death, and nature's workmanship,
To the poor mimicry of art. These eyes,
And brows; that rosy mouth, and golden hair,
Are barren truths, which in the real woman,
Inform'd by the light of life's most subtle magic,
Become transfigured to a thing divine.

FORRESTER.

I can believe it; here it is, my Lord.

ALFORD.

Nay, do not stint yourself, if it pleases you;—
Are you satisfied with gazing?

FORRESTER (*retaining the picture and looking at it*).

'T were unsafe
Much longer to indulge such contemplation—
It seems to grow alive while I look at it.

ALFORD.

Why so it might. Would you care to know this lady?

FORRESTER.

I hardly care to own how much; you'll laugh,
And I feel as if a witchcraft had possess'd me.
It is most strange, but from these eyes a spell
Unutterable—a sudden, irresistible charm
Has seized upon my fancy; I shall offend you,
But I'd give—I know not what—to know her.

ALFORD (*aside*).

Oh ho! there is a right string after all
To make the puppet dance; why, she shall do it.
(*Aloud*)—Don't break your heart; I think that I can say
You shall see her.

FORRESTER.

How!

ALFORD.

And yet not pay that price—
I mean 'you know not what'—for the privilege.
She might prove a dear beauty at that rate.

FORRESTER.

How say you?
That I may see this lady?

ALFORD.

Certainly;
And know her, and converse with her, and more
If it so like you.

FORRESTER.

Indeed! I'm sorry for it!

ALFORD.

Sorry! for what?

FORRESTER.

That she is such an one,
Methinks there shines a spirit in this face
Of inward purity; how sweet and sad
It is! Surely those heavenly eyes are not
Lights that betray men's souls!

ALFORD.

I cry your mercy!
Perhaps you have a vow too against this,
And will not go with me to see this lady?

FORRESTER.

I've no such virtue in me I confess,
But will be bounden to you to fulfil
Your promise to me. That fair countenance
Hath laid fast hold of my fancy. If that woman
Has a price—which yet 't is pity that she has!—

Though 't were my best estate I think I'd give it
To buy her favour

ALFORD.

Good Sir John, to-morrow
You shall strike your bargain for yourself.

FORRESTER.

To-morrow!

I did not think my first half day in England
Could have seem'd so long——

ALFORD.

See, where your brother comes,
Let us go meet him.

FORRESTER (*returning the picture*).

You will certainly
To-morrow let me see her?

ALFORD

Certainly
And if your speed in wooing match my wishes,
To-morrow you may call that lady yours.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE 3.

ANNE's bedroom: she is discovered at the window.

ANNE.

The day goes down, and darkness comes apace,
To muffle up the wickedness and woe
That the light looks on. O that never more
Morning might rise upon the earth! that this
Fast gathering gloom might henceforth shroud the world,
And wrap my shame and sorrow up for ever!
But the hours will go upon their ceaseless errand;
The night will fold her wings, and rising up
Leave on the earth a new-hatch'd day of misery.
And I must wake from sleep, and feel my heart
Clutch'd by remorse and fear ere well I wake;
My dismal and inseparable fellows,
That still lie down, and still rise up with me.
And I am strong and young—great God!—and I
Must live through many, many, many days,
Before I die! Far down through the darkening fields
The river runs; deep, deep, and fast it runs,
And underneath each wave of it there lies
A bed for death. A moaning voice comes to me,
Calling me to lie down and sleep beneath
That glassy coverlid—it were soon done.

No more to fear ; no more to think and suffer ;
No more to know ; no more to recollect.
O blessed fate ! no more to recollect !
I'll do it : it grows night—no one will see me ;
And far, far, when the cruel morning breaks,
My body will go tumbling on the waters
To the great sea—and where shall be my soul ?
O terrible thought ! I shall not die in drowning.
'Tis not my body suffers and remembers ;
It is my soul, and that shall live for ever !
Perchance, too, as I leapt into the waters
'The love of life might rush into my heart ;
And while the choking waves were smothering me,
The sun, the light, might rise before my eyes,
And I might long to live ; and if I call'd,
'Tis night, and none would hear : my husband's far,
And *he* is far. Oh, my heart dies away,
To think of him whom I did love so madly,
Whom now I fear and loathe so utterly !—
There was a sound without ! Sure I heard footsteps,
And a rustling motion near,—O Heaven ! 'tis he.
Oh, I am sick with horror !

[*Enter at the window* ALFORD.

ALFORD.

Ha, fair mistress !
You look'd like a star in the grey evening light ;
You tremble, lady.

ANNE.

You—you make me shudder.

ALFORD.

Shudder—that's cold! trembling is not so cold:
You used to tremble when I met you first,
When first we spake, when first our fingers clasp'd;
But that was trembling full of blushes,—warm,
And not like this cold loathing death shiver.
What, you're not merry! What's the matter, sweet-
heart?

ANNE.

I am not merry! faith, 't is strange I am not,
Having such cause! here do I stand beside
My husband's bed; here, in this sacred chamber,
To marriage vows holy and dedicate;
I, the most foul and falsest wife alive,
And you, whose arts have made me what I am,
The wretch, the creeping, starting, guilty wretch—
In faith, 't is strange I am not merrier!

ALFORD.

Why come, you please me better now,—that's right!
I love to hear you talk, 't will ease your heart too;
And for my part, I am willing to be rail'd at.
Luckily, ladies' scolding breaks no bones,
I should have scarcely had a whole one else

Anon you'll fall to weeping and be well :
Come, is it over ?

ANNE.

Give me patience, Heaven !
To think is madness ! — I, that was once so happy,
So good, so fair, so innocent, — and now !
And dost thou never think ? hast thou no moment,
Not given up to wickedness, when thought
Lays hold of thee ? Dost thou sometimes remember,
In the night, when sleep neglects to visit thee,
Or in some sudden pauses of thy passions,
Dost thou sometimes remember what I was,
And what thou 'st made me ?

ALFORD.

We've been often happy
Together, I remember that.

ANNE.

Oh, never !
Never, so hear me God ! have I been happy,
While sinning with thee. One distracted dream
Of passion, and of guilt, of wild delusion
And horrible remorse, and clinging dread,
Of shame, that eats into my very soul,
This has been all my happiness with thee ;
The damned need not have envied it !

ALFORD.

Come, come ;

You have left out some pleasant hours we 've had.
I thought them pleasant, so did you too once.

ANNE.

Utter them not ! Yet are they register'd
Eternally in the great doomsday book ;
Thence can no tears or prayers wipe them away ;
They 're there,—and thou and I shall read them there,
Before the whole assembled universe,
Upon the judgment day.

ALFORD.

Why, so we shall then :

In the meantime, since neither tears nor prayers
Can wipe them out, think thou no more of them,
But rather let us study to make sweet
This pleasant present life, nor heed the next.
Leave walking up and down so hurriedly.

ANNE.

Alas ! 't is thus with me for ever ! rest
I know not, save in constant restlessness,
Nor joy save in my tears, nor hope, save in
My deep despair.

ALFORD.

Come sit ye down by me.

ANNE.

Oh, leave me! do not touch me, Alford! I know
Your little hour of love for me is past:
You have possess'd me, you have conquer'd me;
Such beauty as I had has been your prize;
My virtue and my peace are all your booty;
Your triumph 's full,—you 've done with me; for mercy
Have done with me indeed! and never more
Come hither where there 's nothing left to tempt you;
Oh, let me go!

ALFORD.

Come, come, I say you shall;
What, coy with me? oh, pshaw! 't is past the time.
Sit down: I 've something I would say to you.

ANNE.

Be brief, or I shall grow to stone.

ALFORD.

'T is pity now
That you should weep so much; your eyes were bright
When first I saw them—they were like the stars.

ANNE.

Have pity on me, Alford!

ALFORD.

Then your hair —
It was not wont to hang dishevell'd thus :
Fie ! it looks slovenly ; where are the braids,
The golden links, the shining glossy curls,
The billowy, glorious waves of floating hair,
That caught my fancy ?

ANNE.

You are mocking me—
I am so miserable—I know you are ;
And yet, I cannot think why you should torture me
So cruelly.

ALFORD.

Why, you were wont to be so brave,
That none came near you in your costliness ;
I'd have you be the woman that you were.

ANNE.

Make me that woman, thou who hast unmade me ;
Do it, oh, do it, if thou canst !

ALFORD.

Nay, hear me.
I'd have you look the laughing, lovely dame,
That once you look'd.

ANNE.

Wherefore?

ALFORD.

You're fair enough

Yet to catch hearts.

ANNE.

What mean you?

ALFORD.

And although

We two be no more lovers, there be some

Who would give much to win your favour, lady.

ANNE.

If thou wouldst have me not go mad at oncè,

Look not, and speak not thus, but let me go!

ALFORD.

No, no, you shall not go. I am a suitor to you;

Not for myself indeed, yet I have hope

That as I once prevail'd, another may

Prevail, for my sake, with you.

ANNE.

What?

ALFORD.

Have patience !

ANNE.

I will not hear !

ALFORD.

Oh yes, you will, and do it :
So hearken now, and leave this fooling, mistress !
I have a friend, a man whom I know well,
Who's a large fortune,—do you hear me ?

ANNE.

Yes.

ALFORD.

Well, then, you know that I have no estate,
Nothing wherewith t' uphold the goodly show
I make, save debts that have been made by it.
You know this.

ANNE.

Yes.

ALFORD.

Good now, here's this to do :
Receive this man, this fool, this friend of mine.
Start not ! but hear me : he is mad for thee !
A goodly fellow too, handsome, and tall ;
This shall advantage thee, and from his wealth
We will together draw advantages ;

For the which thou 'lt pay him in the easy coin
Of kisses, and sweet looks. What, hast thou heard me?—
Art deaf? art dumb? art stone? art dead?

ANNE.

O God!

I'm choking! Can I not get from hence! O Alford!
Upon my knees, I beg, I do implore thee,
Make me not do this horrible wickedness!
By all that I have sacrificed to thee,
By any hope of good, or fear of evil,
Thou mayst acknowledge, make me not do this.
I, whom thou once didst feign to love and worship;
I kiss thy feet, trample upon me, kill me,
Spit on me, spurn me, only spare me this!

ALFORD.

Go to! you're mad! Get up and listen to me!
What more in loving him than loving me?

ANNE.

But him I do not know.

ALFORD.

Pshaw! never mind;
You'll make acquaintance with him presently.

ANNE.

Hear me, you man! I'm an adulteress,
A branded thing, for honest men to scorn,

And true wives to cry out on. This I know ;
I do not wink at mine iniquity,
It glares upon me full, and it is monstrous !
But, if thou deem'st I am that shameless creature,
To turn from man to man, and sell my body
For price of money, 't is not so I tell thee !
I loved thee, idiot ! idiot that I was !
But I am not a common harlot yet !

ALFORD.

Another storm, and then another shower,
And then a little while of sunny weather.
What dost thou think that I intend to do,
If thou deniest me ?

ANNE.

Do thy worst, and spare not
Thou'lt tell my husband—nay, I'll be before thee.
Let him but once return, and I lay down
The heavy load of all my sins before him ;
If he do strike me dead, I'll bless him for 't.

ALFORD.

And leave him, too, a fair inheritance,
A goodly name thro' all the country side,
A precious title added to his Judgeship.
Now, I am not so high heroical
To wish your husband's fair fame branded thus ;

Methinks 't were pity that the good Judge Winthrop
Should be a scoffing mark in the public streets.
And tho' if you were dead, you might not hear it;
You leave your husband but an ugly name.

ANNE.

O God, preserve me ! I shall sure run mad.
What will become of me ?

ALFORD.

Oh, why you 'll be
The whole world's wonder for your truth-telling.

ANNE.

Devil ! be quick and say what I must do ?

ALFORD.

Write straight, and hither bid this gentleman.

ANNE.

When must I bid him ?

ALFORD.

Bid him come to-morrow.

ANNE.

How must he come ?

ALFORD.

Oh, by our own old way—
The yew-tree path, by the mossy orchard wall.

ANNE.

Shall he come *that* way? and will you show it him?

ALFORD.

I will; and now that you 're so reasonable,
I will do more. He does not know your name,
Nor who you are, nor aught concerning you;
I'll bring him blindfold hither, and if you
Keep your own counsel, your good name may stand
As fair as ever. So farewell!

ANNE.

I thank you.

[*She faints on the ground: he goes out.*]

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT IV.

SCENE 1.

ANNE'S bedchamber—early morning. *She is lying asleep on the bed.*

ANNE.

Oh, mercy, husband, mercy! do not murder me!
Alford, help, help me—I am drowning! Oh,
Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! I am awake—alive.
My husband does not know; I am not drowning;
'Tis daylight once again, and all is well.
That's false—all is not well; I know it is not,
Yet do not recollect what is amiss.
Let's see—let's see! I dreamt my husband came,
And frowning, thrust a knife into my heart.
I felt the cold sharp point of the steel go thro' me,
And then a heap of rushing waves came over me,
And I was choking—and upon the bank
There stood a devil laughing, with the eyes
Of—of—why, what? was he not here last night?
Last night! Was that a dream? Stood I not here,
Lost in tremendous thoughts of sin and death,
And came there not that man — that devil — who bade
me
Stoop to the vilest shame that ere tongue utter'd,
Or thought conceived? Why, was that true indeed!
Did I consent, is't possible I did!

Is 't possible, that here—that now—e'en now—
He may be coming,—nay, he may be come !
Oh ! no, no, never ! no, it is not true ;
It was some hideous fancy, which in the night
Took up the wretched dreamings of the day,
And wrought it into shape. O Heaven ! nor night
Nor day to taste of rest ! but this most certainly
Was a bad dream—no doubt, an evil dream.
Nought else—nought else.

[*She goes to the window ; enter SIR JOHN FORRESTER.*

Oh, God ! no ! it was true.

FORRESTER.

I come not unexpected, nor unbidden,
O fairest lady ! wherefore start you, then ?
See, in my hand I hold the gracious words
That gave me leave to look upon your beauty,
And make my eyes and heart its slaves for ever.

ANNE.

Where am I fallen !

FORRESTER.

Oh, turn not thus away !

In nought have I deserved such cold reproof,
Save daring to admire you ; yet yourself
In gentle bidding writ that I should come,
And I have flown. Nor was your hest forgotten ;
I have not raised audacious hands, to draw
The curtain you have folded round yourself ;

Blindfold, e'en as you bade, I here was brought;
I do not know the happy path that leads
To where you dwell,—I do not know your name,
Nor e'en the very house that holds you;—now,
This instant, in a chamber close at hand,
Were my eyes loosed from this enforced darkness,
And I stand dazzled as before the sun.
Look on me, lovely lady, that I may
Believe the image stamp'd upon my heart,
From the cold tablet of your counterfeit

ANNE.

I cannot breathe,—I sink with shame!

FORRESTER.

'T is strange,

So coy a bearing! Nay, I woo too coldly;
And in your heart I know you laugh at me,
That I stand tamely gazing at you thus,
Nor seek to win you to a softer mood,
With more importunate wooing. Come, be kind
As you are fair, nor with cold winter now
Freeze up the hopes yourself have made to spring;
You did not summon me to mock at me.
Sweet one! let me touch your hand—

ANNE.

O Heaven!

Stand from me! let me go!

FORRESTER.

How now, fair dame?

ANNE.

For mercy's sake, sir!

FORRESTER.

Trembling, and in tears!

ANNE.

If you have yet a mother, for her sake!

If you've a virtuous sister!

FORRESTER.

Why, what's here!

Upon your finger a ring—a wedding ring!

Your gay attire, your blooming youth, forbid

To think you are a widow ;—is it possible

You are—?

ANNE.

A wife! a wicked, wicked wife!

The shame and curse of a trusting noble husband.

O sir, if ever in your heart you held

The image of a chaste and holy woman,

If yet the honour'd life or memory

Of her who bore you lives within your mind,

If ever you desire to win a wife,

Whose love shall be a sacred sanctuary,
Open to you alone ;—if e'er in woman
You hope for honour or for happiness,
Now turn from this foul suit, nor seek to sink
Yet deeper in iniquity a wretch
So lost as I !—for manhood's sake forbear !
Stretch not the advantage that you have o'er me ;
Have pity, sir ! have pity !

FORRESTER.

How deep we go
In the first step we take in sin, we know not.
Rise, lady ! nor to such humility
Stoop that fair form. What shall I say to you ?
You have no need to pray me to forbear ;
Were you the fairest she that ever lived,
And I more madly lost in love with you,
Than ever man with woman was before,
Here is a spell of power to exorcise
The devil of unchaste thoughts and wild desires,
And make me blush I ever had such toward you.
And did the fellow of this wedded hand
Write this ?

ANNE.

Nay, I will tell you all,—yes, all,
And trust your nobleness to pity me.
The man that brought you here found in my heart

An evil spot, which he hath spread so large,
That 't is a plague infecting my whole body.
From the chaste duties of a wife I fell,
Lured by his arts, therefore I stand before you,
Bow'd down with shame, with sorrow, and repentance.
O worthy sir, forbear to spit on me,
But leave me mercifully, and forget
That e'er you saw or spoke with such a creature.

FORRESTER.

Double-dyed villain ! but that dear respect
Of you and your sad secret hold me back,
I would requite these goodly dealings presently.

ANNE.

For Heaven's sake do not so ! My husband yet
Knows not my guilt ; and in the world's eye still
I am honour'd ; do not tear away the veil
That keeps me from one universal hiss ;
Say nothing,—oh, say nothing, but begone !

FORRESTER.

I will begone : I now perceive how far
The giving way to a licentious wish
Might have betray'd me into sinning. Madam,
Your beauty, which awoke those thoughts in me,
Now teaches me to feel you have but stray'd
Into sin's confines, and will straight turn back ;
For good is sure your proper element.

You were not deck'd thus rarely, to become
A snare to those who look on you, but rather,
Believe it, and return to your right office,
To make all men in love with excellence,
Made fairer by your perfect loveliness.
Pardon me, gentle lady! but these tears,
These gracious drops, now falling from your eyes,
Make bold my heart with virtuous love for you.
Oh, trust your husband! do not any more
Deceive him, but with noble courage, seek
Forgiveness first from him, and then from Heaven.
Farewell, for ever! as I came, I go:
To the detested guidance of your enemy
I must commit myself, and bear awhile
His fellowship, with what patience I best may.
Blindfold, I will retrace my steps, nor seek
To know aught more than you have deign'd to tell me.
And be you sure of this, if e'er hereafter
I should encounter you, here or elsewhere—
As such a chance, perhaps, might yet befall me—
Neither by word, or look, or slightest sign,
Shall you be made to recollect by me
That ever I beheld your face before.
And so, farewell!

'ANNE.'

The blessings of a soul
Turn'd back from sinning, dwell with you for ever!

[Exit FORRESTER. *Scene changes.*]

SCENE 2.

Garden of Judge WINTHROP'S house. MARY discovered.

MARY.

The blossoms are all gone,—how soon they pass'd !
And now already can I spy the round
And downy shape of the half-formed fruit.
It looks no more so fair, nor smells so sweet,
Yet it has grown more worth ; and the husbandman,
Tells how the promise of the flowers was true.
Methinks this tree speaks as a living voice,
And such a lesson as a maid may hearken to,
Who loves and dreams of marriage. It is now
With us, in our sweet hopes, and happy dreams,
The very hour of pleasant blossoming.
Love, joy, and youth, within our bosoms make
A sunny May-day ; but the tree is full,
Full flush'd with flowers, all open, all wide blown.
Then what comes next ? that they must fall,—'tis pity !
So turn we to the graver days of life,
Full of the sober happiness of duty ;
And in the ripening sun of time, we grow
To a goodly prosperous autumn,—and what then ?
Shall it be winter ever in our hearts ?
O tree ! how soon thou hast shed thy pleasant crown,
Which, ere thou wear again, thy fruit must drop,
Thy leaves grow withered, and thy sap run cold,

And thou be pinch'd in a stern and barren winter.
But not to such conclusion need we come,
While Love's sweet flower yet lives within our hearts,
And all our mellow golden autumn fruits
Are stored for the empty days which we will fill
With happy memories and blessed hopes.

[*Enter a Servant.*

SERVANT.

Madam, from the fern knoll I can see Eustace
Hard riding to the house ; the post is in.

[*Exit Servant.*

MARY.

Oh, he brings letters ! Oh, he is too happy,
To hold in his hands the precious words of love
That make my heart dance !

[*Enter ANNE.*

ANNE.

Here's your letter, Mary.
Oh, how your blood reads from your cheek this writing !
Will you not look inside ?

MARY.

I am afraid ;
The sight of the mere paper is a blessing,
But what's within I know not.

ANNE.

Shall I read it

For you ?

MARY.

No, you shall not,—I thank you.

ANNE.

Here 's one for my husband, in a character
I do not know,—and here is one from him.

MARY (*reading her letter*).

O·Heavens !

ANNE (*reading her letter*).

What 's the matter ? Why, my husband
Must be e'en now at the gates ; for this was writ
Yesterday, saying that he comes to-morrow,
By early morning ;—what 's the matter, Mary ?
Ill news ? say, dear,—is Master Forrester sick ?
Hath aught befallen him ?

MARY.

Oh, me ! that ever
We should let steal our hearts out of our breasts,
And trust them in such cruel, careless keeping !
Thoughtless and thriftless !

ANNE.

What ?

MARY.

He writes me here,
That dicing two nights back with the Lord Alford—
I hate that man ! I always hated him !
From the first I thought he looked a very villain,
And now he's proved so !

ANNE.

What of him ? go on.

MARY.

James Forrester has lost so deeply to him,
That he says he knows not how he e'er shall answer it,
Or when in this, his fortune's shatter'd plight,
He can fulfil his word, and marry me.
Oh ! I was happy, happy, and contented
Before I knew him ; but my peace is gone,
Gone, and for ever. This it is to love !

ANNE.

Oh, cheer thee, wench ! the mischief may not be
So great ; his brother's wealthy—

MARY.

What of that ?

Shall his honourable brother bear the charge
Of his dishonest ventures ?—'t is dishonest
To venture what one cannot want.

ANNE.

Lord Alford

Is his friend, and peradventure—

MARY.

More's the pity

That he's his friend! and is it a friend's office
To let him play himself beyond his depth,
And turn from friend to creditor? Out on it!
Is this the dealing of a friend or gentleman!

ANNE.

He will remit the debt, no doubt of it.

MARY.

But I do doubt it; and what if he did?
That's looking at the end, and not the action.
If he forgave him fifty fold his debt,
Does that undo his having risk'd so much?
Besides, I'm sure he will do no such thing.

ANNE.

Why are you sure?

MARY.

Because, from every word
I ever heard him speak, I judge him false.
I never could abide the look of his eyes;
But you, now I bethink me, seem'd to like him.

ANNE.

Who, I!—

MARY.

I thought you did, and marvell'd at it.

For you had heard, as well as I, the tales
Of wickedness, that ever, like foul shadows,
Follow'd his name; you knew his bad renown;
I wonder that my brother ever suffer'd him,
Or Master Forrester could call him friend.

ANNE.

You judge him hardly—

MARY.

Can he be so judged?

What, a heartless thief, who to the honest man
That opes his door to him holds out his hand,
And with the other stabs him in the back.
The cowardly tempter of frail women, one
Whose noblest trophies are a foul disgrace
To a true-born gentleman;—I would have such
Whipp'd through the land, as they do by common
felons,
For daring so to smirch the name he bears,
The honour'd name of an English lord.

ANNE.

Good Heaven!

How like you look to your brother!

MARY.

Oh!

I am wrought beyond myself. Alas! and 't is
Another who hath raised this tempest in me.
I am no more mine own! another's fate
Moves me to weep or smile; another's deeds
Make me rejoice or mourn,—this 't is to love!
Two months agoe what matter'd, what cared I
Who play'd, or who forbore, who lost, or won?
My thoughts ne'er wander'd from this pleasant home
Of cheerful, sweet monotony; but now—
A man has carried hence my heart with him;
I am in London, I am no more here,
And all save him is nothing; this it is
To love!

ANNE.

Poor child! she weeps! her tears
Are like clear drops from an overbrimming fountain,
Freshening whereon they fall; she does not know,
The tears that from the black well of remorse
Distil their bitter poison down one's cheeks,
Blistering and scorching furrows in one's soul.
Weep not, dear Mary.

MARY.

No,—'t is of no avail.

I will not weep; I will have patience, sister.

Sweet patience will come comfort me. My flowers
Look sick and silly, and I care for them no more ;
But I'll go walk among them, and take counsel
Of their meek bowing when the hail-storms beat them.
Upon the road I hear the grating wheels ;
'Tis my brother ; I shall go, for if he sees
My eyes so red, he will be wroth, I know,
And speak hard words of Master Forrester,
And that would be the worst to bear of all.

[*Exit* MARY.]

ANNE.

Oh, pure in spirit ! as she passes by me
My heart shrinks back, instinct with its own foulness,
From her clear presence. Now my husband comes,
And I must utter all. Good Heaven, support me !

WINTHROP (*without*).

What, wife ! ho, wife !

ANNE.

I cannot ; I shall die !

I cannot now ; some other time I will.

[*Enter* WINTHROP.]

WINTHROP.

Dear wife ! dear Anne ! oh, I grow young again,
Whene'er from absence I return to thee !
Sweet is the air around one's home, and sweet

The light that shines upon it, and more sweet
The faithful love that, like a holy lamp,
Burns night and day within its sanctuary!

ANNE.

Good husband, welcome back!

WINTHROP.

As I rode up
The park, and o'er the lawny slopes, and through
The spreading chestnuts saw our pleasant house,
And thought within myself how you and Mary
Were waiting my return with loving eyes,
Oft looking toward my coming, beck'ning me
With your fond wishes—oh! I bless'd my God
Who made me capable of love, and gave me
Such precious things to spend that love upon.
Draw not away thine hands, nor drop thy lids;
But fix those eyes, clear windows of thy soul,
And my most comfortable stars, upon me.
O Anne!

ANNE.

What are you thinking of?

WINTHROP.

O wife!

How savage and how wild a deed is hers,
That woman's, who, with cursed and cruel hands,

Shatters the crystal vial of her faith,
And on the stony paths of life throws forth
Her husband's honour, peace, and happiness,
To bleed to death; oh! 't is a sin unransom'd!

ANNE.

O Heavens! what put that thought into your head?

WINTHROP.

The sense of mine own wealth; the sight of thee,
My treasure! and the dismal fate of one,
A man I've seen of late, who hath been thus spoil'd
By the familiar devil that lay in his breast,
His wife—nay, but this story moves thee more
Than I could wish—what, pale, and trembling, love!
Come cheer, come cheer, let's speak of something else.
Where is the child? where is my darling Mary?

ANNE.

She has gone heavily into the house
With a letter from James Forrester.

WINTHROP.

Ha! poor wench!

She's yet to prove the wise man's saying true—
Who loves and longs in a single day grows old.
But what's the news? ill news?

ANNE.

I scarcely know,
She'll tell you all anon; here's a letter come for you,
I have something crush'd it—

WINTHROP.

Let us see, my dame.
Ho, wife, here is brave news! Hark thee, good Anne,
Hie thee, and presently deck up the best guest
chamber,
Let the damask hangings be spread all around it,
And stick fair branches of the early flowers
About—and strew the ground with lavender,
And lay the fine holland woof upon the bed.
My dearest friend, a man you've heard me speak of
For ever with good words, comes here to-day;
He writes me thus: —'Strange chances, to be told
Hereafter, when we meet, have brought me now,
Within six miles of you; and so I purpose,
As soon as that six miles may be gone o'er,
To lodge beneath your roof a night.' Dear Anne,
This is John Forrester, whose name you know,
The one true friend good Heaven has blest me with.
Go in, dear, and make ready with best speed,
And with our primest cheer and warmest welcome
Prepare all things. Oh, I'm merry, dear;
He hath yet to know thee, yet to see thee, Anne.

I have commended thee full oft to him,
And wish'd he could but know how happily
I was wived; make thyself brave, and show
I was no braggart.

ANNE.

I shall do my best, sir.

[*Exit ANNE.*]

WINTHROP.

Let's see, six years, come Martinmas six years,
Since last we met; and he hath grown a baronet,
And I have married, and a thousand things
To gossip on have pass'd since then. I marvel
What chance he hints at brings him hitherwards;
The late Sir John's estates lie not this way;
He says no word of James, nor of the news
Mary has gotten from him; well, well, well,
'T will all be told 'twixt this and eventide.
Ho! Walter!

[*Enter Servant.*]

Get thee to the cellarage,
And draw from the best butt of Burgundy,
And let me have sack of the eldest Sherris,
And bid them lay before the fire the haunch
Of the lusty buck, brought in o' Tuesday last.
We will have cheer, and rouse.

[*Exit Servant.*]

And if he's got

A title and estates, I have a wife,
A fair young wife !

[*Enter a Servant.*

SERVANT.

One Sir John Forrester would see your worship.

WINTHROP.

Where is he ?

SERVANT.

Here at hand, sir, but new lighted ;
He follows on my heels.

WINTHROP.

Oh, bring him straight !

[*Exit Servant. Re-enter with SIR JOHN FORRESTER.*

WINTHROP.

Welcome, thrice welcome, and again most welcome,
Good John ! Sir John, for new-made honour
Loves its own name.

FORRESTER.

The man who once
Hath call'd you friend can find no better title,
My worthy friend and master.

WINTHROP.

Heart of gold !
Give me your hand ; it warms my blood to see you
Once more at home, in this my home.

FORRESTER.

It looks
Most pleasantly, and lovingly, dear Winthrop !
In its new green ; the old trees, with their limbs
Not hidden yet by their tender veil of leaves.
How happy I have been here !

WINTHROP.

And you shall
Be just as happy.

FORRESTER.

You are married now.

WINTHROP.

What then ! you are no raking, mad companion,
Such as good housewives hate, who waste the night
Draining of wine-pledges ; and my good wife
Loves me enough to love my friends right heartily.

FORRESTER.

'T is strange you should be married !

WINTHROP.

Why, I've writ
Often enough to thee about the matter
To make it no more strange. Why, you look gravely.
Are you weary with your riding?

FORRESTER.

Not a whit.

WINTHROP.

Yet you look gravely. Adso ! tell me now
What chance 'twas brought you near me, that you
writ of.

FORRESTER.

If I look gravely, 't is that very chance.
'T is a close secret, not mine own to tell,
But a lady's.

WINTHROP.

Ha, lad ! sits the wind that way ?
Art thou for wiving too ?

FORRESTER.

I never
Was further from it yet. No, I do think,
If a wedlock prosperous beyond my hope,
In the virtue, beauty, nobleness, and wealth

Of a bride were offer'd me, I should turn loathing
from it
As though in my wine-cup I should spy a toad.

WINTHROP.

Why, what 's the matter?

FORRESTER.

Oh! I have seen the inside
Of such a thing! the seamy, foul inside
Of what was held, *is* held, a prosperous wedlock.
I have seen that which, while I live, I think,
Will make my heart heave at the thought of marrying.

WINTHROP.

Why this is strange! You make me muse: e'en now
I have returned home from a sad errand,
Between a noble pair about to part,
The lady having past all mercy sinn'd,
And wreck'd by her ill-government the vessel
Of their whole lives' peace. Can it be possible
This plague is growing with us?

FORRESTER.

God forbid!

And once again I say it, God forbid!
Not in her stormy girdle of proud waves,
Not in the rugged ramparts of her rocks,
Not in the winged fleets that fly around her,

Guarding her watery gates, lies the defence
Of our dear country ; but within her homes,
The virtue and the truth upgarner'd there,
Lives the right strength of England. Let but once
Rottenness creep to this, the inward core
Of all true bravery, and we are nothing.
O my dear country ! dearer now that I
Return from foreign lands, to breathe again
Thy purer air — far be the day from thee,
When the vile pest of strange licentiousness,
Shall, like a poison, course within thy veins,
Tainting thy wholesome body, and taking from thee
The crown that thou hast worn since the first day
The sea did homage to thy milky cliffs,
Emblems of power and purity within !

WINTHROP.

Well pray'd, good Englishman ; amen ! and now
Let's brush away these ill thoughts from our minds :
Let's not, for one deceitful marriage, think
All marriages accurst,—I cannot think so ;
And hope again to make revive in thee
The honourable esteem thou once hadst for it.
That I am married moves your marvel, Forrester ;
You will be wider yet amazed, to hear
My wife is little more than half my years ;
She might have been my daughter. Shall I tell you
Of her beauty ? No, you will see her presently.

Of her virtuous excellence, and modest worth,
Her noble gentleness, her temperate pride,
Her loftiness of spirit, that gives her the mien
And gait of a sovereign queen? My good young friend,
Think not I dote—my life has found its crown
In a fair woman—oh! such a woman, John!
By heaven! I am ashamed to speak my mind of her,
Or tell another man, how high I rate
My wife—

FORRESTER.

I am impatient to behold her.

[*Enter MARY.*

Is this your lady? No, this is your sister,
For softened in each feature, I behold
The image of your face. Your sister, Winthrop,
Is a fair glass, reflecting back yourself.
Lady, by your leave!

WINTHROP.

She has clean forgotten thee.
Will you not ask Sir John after his brother?
But you care nothing for him; I remember,
You heed not how he fares, you will not ask;
So tell *me*, when comes Master James among us?

FORRESTER.

I hope in two days hence. Sweet Mistress Mary,

I was your playfellow once on a while ;
My brother holds a happier fellowship with you.

WINTHROP.

But come, come, come, 't is dinner-time, ha, wife !

[*Enter ANNE.*

Are you come at last ! Now, sir, here is the lady.
Anne, this is Sir John Forrester, my friend ;
So bid him welcome to my house, sweet Anne.

ANNE.

You are very welcome !—

WINTHROP.

What's the matter ?

ANNE.

Nothing :

You are very welcome to my husband's house.

FORRESTER.

As your husband's friend, fair madam, let me thank
you,

And call myself yours as well as his.

WINTHROP.

Come in ;

I have ridden hard, and have a stomach brooks not
Too much nice ceremony. Forrester, come,

Take in my lady, and do thou, sweet Mary,
Give me thy hand—ha, fie ! 't is given already ;
But let 's go in to dinner for all that.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

SCENE 3.

A room in JUDGE WINTHROP'S house. Servants carry in dishes, and place them on the table. Enter FORRESTER and ANNE, WINTHROP and MARY; they seat themselves.

WINTHROP.

For his good gifts be the Lord thank'd ! Now wife,
Fall to, and let us eat. What, you look gravely ;
And you too, Forrester, wear yet a cloud
More dark than was before upon your brow,
And Mary mopes for company—or lack of it.
Come, fill your glasses, I will give you a pledge ;
Fill to the brim ! the present and the absent !
I 'm sorry I 'm the only one amongst you
That seems in humour with my dinner.

FORRESTER.

This is

A pleasant house, madam, that you live in here ;
Yon sloping upland, crowned with leafy garlands
Of rocking woods, and that clear brimming river,
Make a perpetual pageant to the eye.
Is that water deep ?

ANNE.

Yes—no—

WINTHROP.

Ay, deep enough
To drown thee, little wife, if thou should'st try it.

MARY.

You do not eat, sir,

WINTHROP.

No, nor drink.

FORRESTER.

One might
Be happy here.

WINTHROP.

One might ! aye, and one is.
I'll say it, though my wife will not ; is one not
Happy here, Anne ?

ANNE.

I hope you 're happy, sir.

FORRESTER.

Like one athirst, who buries all his head
In the cup from which he drinks, nor breathes, nor stirs,
Till he has drain'd to the very end ; so we,

Quaffing sweet happiness, raise not our eyes
Over the brim to look beyond.

WINTHROP.

How now !

How now ! I wear the grey hair here, yet I
Alone am merry ; why, my friend, is it
A sin to thank Heaven for my blessings ?

FORRESTER.

No ;

But they are Heaven's, not yours, remember it.

WINTHROP.

Why you amaze me ! shall I look around,
And see my life crown'd with each several joy
That life may hold, and which for the most part
Are singly dealt to mortals, nor combined
Upon one head ; shall I be rich, and honour'd,
And loved, nor know it, nor be thankful for it !
Go to ! 't is not thy grave face or grave words
Shall fright me from my mirth ; and still I say,
There breathes no happier man in England now,
In England—in the world than I am !

[*Enter a Servant.*

SERVANT.

Sir,

A rider who just spurred to the gate, threw this
Into my hands, and straight across the park

Gallop'd in foaming haste, shouting me back,
To put it in your worship's hands—none other.
It must be very urgent, for his horse
Was smoking with his speed, and from his mouth
Flew the white foam flakes, and his nostrils puff'd
With snorting breath the air, while his vein'd sides,
All dark with sweat, panted beneath his rider.
He did not stay a minute for his errand,
But wheel'd and fled, as one pursued for life.

WINTHROP (*opens the letter*).

What !

[*He starts up, they all rise.*

ANNE.

What's the matter ?

MARY.

Brother !

FORRESTER.

What is it ?

WINTHROP.

Nothing ; sit down !

ANNE.

For mercy's sake !

WINTHROP.

Sit down !

I say--none stir, that—sit—sit—sit ye down !

I will be back anon.

[*Exit* WINTHROP.]

ANNE.

Oh, I am lost !

SCENE 4.

JUDGE WINTHROP'S garden.

Enter WINTHROP, *hurriedly, with letters in his hand.*

WINTHROP.

So—here is air—so—so—one may breathe here ;
And daylight—I can see to read ; and room
If I should swell with rage to bursting, or
Go mad, or rave like an unchain'd dog ; but none
To bite ; yet I will bite. Hell and its devils ! here,
And here, and here—two, three, all hers—all writ by
her.

Let's see, let's see—God give me patience ! ' Dearest,
He is from home to-night '—*He!* ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !
The dolt, the horned beast, led i' the noose,
And ridden by this piece of painted flesh—
' He is from home to-night ; he will be gone
For yet two days. Come, and be safe and happy.'

Let me not die, good Heaven ! let me not !
A palsy shakes in my limbs, yet let me live
An hour—but one—to blast her. Devil ! oh, devil !
'The old man.' Old ! curst be thy poisonous youth !
Viper ! forked viper ! woman ! wife ! What, shame !
What, pointed at as I go thro' the streets
For her lewdness ; the old doting fool, who kept
A wanton wife to cut his honour's throat,
And drive him raging mad into his grave !
I'll murder her, I will ; now, now, with the knife
That lies on the table yonder ! Better, better—
I'll have her dragg'd before the court ; I'll have her
In a sheet, barefoot, walk thro' the public ways ;
She shall be haul'd through the mud, and hooted at,
And hiss'd—my wife—my wife—ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !
And I, the Judge, the—oh !

[*Enter MARY.*

MARY.

Good brother !—brother !
Why have you left the room so suddenly ?

WINTHROP.

Where's Mistress Winthrop ?—where's my wife ?

MARY.

Within,

Much grieved at your distemperature.

WINTHROP.

Kind soul !

Sweet loving wife ! what wonder'd, ha ? and sigh'd,
What might the matter be ? she did, did she ?
Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !

MARY.

Come in.

WINTHROP.

Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !

MARY.

In God's name, what's the matter ? brother—brother !

WINTHROP.

Is she alone ? who's with her ?

MARY.

Sir John Forrester.

WINTHROP.

What ! did you leave her all alone with him—
Alone with a man ?—did you not know she is—

MARY.

What ?

WINTHROP.

Oh, a very modest woman, so make haste

And get to her again. Leave me, d'ye hear!
And send her to me.

[*Exit* MARY.]

I am going mad:

Fire dances all about before my eyes,
And my blood bubbles boiling up and down,
And the air is hot as hell blasts. I will not—
I'll not go mad until I speak with her;
My brain shall hold, I will not drivel yet;
Not yet for one half hour, and then, great God!
Blot out my sense for ever! let me become
In all things as in this—a crazy idiot,
With eyes wide blind, and neither thought or memory.
No memory, good Heaven! no memory!

[*Enter* ANNE.]

ANNE.

The earth sinks in under my feet! I'm blind
With terror.

WINTHROP.

I do hear her feet, and the rustle
Of her clothes; she's coming near me; if she touches
me
I shall surely murder her.

ANNE.

Sir, I am here.

WINTHROP.

Oh, are you so?

ANNE.

Mercy ! oh, mercy, mercy !

You know it all.

WINTHROP.

What do I know ?—say what ?

What do I know ? or rather, what know you,
That like a vile thing you lie there i' the dust,
Kissing my feet ? Oh, for some ready weapon,
To let thy hot blood from thy veins !

ANNE.

Oh, husband !

WINTHROP.

Peace, devil ! wilt thou utter such a word ?
What is't ? thy screen, thy cover-shame, thy curtain,
That decently keeps thy foulness from the world.
Infamous creature !

ANNE.

Oh, have mercy ! help !

WINTHROP.

Close up thy lips ! utter no sound ! by Heaven,
If thou but breathe aloud I'll murder thee !
What, wilt thou raise the house, the neighbourhood ?
Shall your servants and your gossips come to gape
Upon your shame ?—perhaps they know it, though !

Perhaps your grooms, and footmen too, had word
Of when I lay from home. How many,—say,
How many hast thou entertain'd?

ANNE.

O God!

WINTHROP.

I'll have thee branded in the forehead, wanton!
Shalt thou walk forth with that white brow, and those
Blue eyes, that look like summer depths in Heaven,
And none know what's behind that goodly mask?
Thou shalt be labell'd, pointed at, as I am;
I'll have thee set i' the public pillory,
Thou shalt be spit at, grinn'd at, hooted at—
Thou shalt, thou shalt, though I die at the foot of it.

ANNE.

One word!—yet hear me!

WINTHROP.

Wilt thou touch me?

ANNE.

Mercy!

WINTHROP.

Hold off thy hands, or I will trample thee
Under my feet, here as thou liest! What's this?

Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! good wife ! her wedding ring !
What dost thou wear this for ? for sport ? for mock ?
Off with it !—off, I say ! and find some badge
That fits thy liberal life ; give it, I say !
Cursed be the day when first I put it on thee !
Oh, if there be a power that hears the curses
Of injured men, let it give ear to mine !
Mayst thou fall down from baseness unto baseness,
Till in the mud and filth of lowest infamy
Thou liest wallowing ! May thy fatal beauty
Turn to a scarr'd and loathsome hideousness,
Thy lovers, who have fed upon thy wantonness,
Spurn at thee with abhorrence ; mayst thou die,
Flung off like some foul rag, i' the common streets.
Mayst thou—

[He falls down.]

ANNE.

Oh ! he is dead ! I've murder'd him ! help ! help !

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V.

SCENE 1.

A room in JUDGE WINTHROP'S house. Enter two Servants.

FIRST SERVANT.

Hist ! hist !—for the love of life, come hither !

SECOND SERVANT.

Well, how now ?

FIRST SERVANT.

What's toward in the library yonder ?

SECOND SERVANT.

I know not ! how dost thou mean ?

FIRST SERVANT.

His worship's sitting there all dressed in black :
dost thou know, he must have had an ugly fall that
the leech bled him for ! He's as pale as death, and may
I ne'er be believed but his head is white !

SECOND SERVANT.

What, white, sayst thou ? It cannot be ; but yesterday 't was grey, an iron grizzled.

FIRST SERVANT.

I know it, a good manly head,—'t is now an old man's

poll; and in one night the snow has fallen thick and covered it. His face looks lean, and withered, and strange, and as I hurried through, he made an angry motion with his hand, and Sir John Forrester bade me get from thence, and that we none of us should enter there till sent for.

SECOND SERVANT.

Where be the ladies?—my lady and Mistress Mary?

FIRST SERVANT.

There too: they stood leaning against each other, for all the world like a pair of twin churchyard images, cut out in stone. My lady said never a word, but Mistress Mary wept like a fountain. What can it mean? What can it all mean?

SECOND SERVANT.

My life to a silver penny, the parcel that thou broughtest t' other day is at the bottom on 't. Hark!—hush!—I thought I heard his worship's voice! Let us not be caught together here; let's get to the pantry, and talk at ease; some one is coming,—let's not be found, for something's sure amiss!

[*Exeunt Servants.*]

SCENE 2.

JUDGE WINTHROP'S library.

*He is discovered sitting, SIR JOHN FORRESTER standing by him :**MARY and ANNE in the front of the stage.*

WINTHROP.

Will you draw nearer, madam ? I must speak to you,
And I am weak and cannot well speak loud.
Be pleased to listen to me. You have borne my name
Near on six years ; you—you— During that time,
Honour, affection, trust, and such indulgence
As my means offer'd, I have freely given you.
Let me be brief ; how you have answer'd this,
And how repaid it, you well know. 'T is past !
Wipe it from your conscience how you will, 't is over !
You'll tell me you were young, and I was old,
Grey-headed, careful,—yet you married me !
You did it out of thankfulness ; there 't is.
You did—and I believed 't was love. Well—
Well—well—it is for this, that I forbear
To cast you off, and give you to the scorn
Of the world to scourge you for your sin ; for I
Sinn'd deeply first in folly, and therefore,
I'll bear without complaint the stab you've given me ;
But here are two who do love me indeed,
And before them I must be justified.
Had you been true, Anne—had I held your heart—
The love of the wide world might have gone begging.

But you have filch'd my treasure from me, and now
I gather up and count such poor remains
As I can call my own. Before the world
I care not how I stand; but before these
I must be clear'd. I cannot spare their love,
Nor by them be accused of cruelty.
Speak, is this just? Do I deal rightly by you?

ANNE.

Oh! oh!

WINTHROP.

Pray do not weep! pray do not!
Come, this must end. Sister and friend, this woman—

MARY.

Oh, do not utter it! —

WINTHROP.

She's false, she's false;
And I, a wretch, cover'd with shame and misery,
Must drag my rest of years out as I may,
In bitter and disgracèd loneliness.

FORRESTER.

Oh, let this quickly end, 't will kill us all!

WINTHROP.

True, true; I have no right to make you suffer.
I will not publish you, I will not shame you;
The world shall never know the thing you are.

Live yet at home, here, in my house, and call,
As heretofore, all things in it your own.
Only, this little let me beg : this room,
My wonted dwelling room, let me reserve ;
And the yew-tree walk that stretches here before it,
For my daily use and exercise I'll keep.
Take all the rest ; but here, where I shall live,
I do command you never to set foot.
Let me never, never, hear your voice again,
Nor ever, while I live, behold your face ! [*He rises.*
O friend ! sometimes i' the time when I was happy,
I mourn'd to think my life was growing short ;
But now, thank God I am not young ! Come, come ;
Give me your arm, and lead me out i' the air.
Yet, stay a little : those intemperate words,
That wicked curse, I uttered in my agony,
I do retract it, and I pray you pardon it !
I sinn'd to think it ; God forgive you, Anne !
And grant you to repent. Farewell !

[*Exeunt* JUDGE WINTHROP and FORRESTER.

MARY.

O sister !

ANNE.

What ! will you touch me ? will you look upon me ?
Do you not fear to catch this pestilence,
With which I am alive from head to foot ?

MARY.

Oh hush ! hush ! hush ! lie still in my arms, my tears
Shall wash you of your fault ; oh, would to Heaven
Your sorrow were all mine !—poor—poor—

ANNE.

How pale—

How white he looked ! Dost thou not think that God
Looks as he look'd, when He sends souls to hell ?

MARY.

Oh, what wild words are these !

ANNE.

Yes ; then, you know,

The blue sky rises up further and further,
And vanishes away ; and one goes falling
Down, down, down, into bottomless despair.

MARY.

What dreadful thoughts !

ANNE.

Hark ! now I 'm call'd—all round,
Eyes, staring eyes, all round—to see my shame—
A world of them ! Look there ! there sits my father
Yonder, that stern old man ; and now, my husband
Stands up, and points me out for sentence. No !
No ! no ! I will not hear it, mercy ! mercy !

Hark ! my hair rouses, and my heart stands still.
Did you hear that—and how the devils shouted ?
Great God ! let me not be deliver'd up to him,
Oh, not to him—for ever and for ever !
To every fiend in hell, but not to him !
Look down, look down, in the red fire—he 's there !
He grins and beckons me ! he welcomes me !
Ha ! ha ! ha ! sweetheart ! so we meet in hell ;
That 's merry ! well met, well met, sweetheart ! look,
He holds his arms out, he has clutch'd me—ha !
Help ! help ! the fire leaps up like serpents' tongues
In eager flames all round me—I am burning !
Undo his hands ! he hauls me into them,
He pulls, he drags me—horror ! save me ! save me !

MARY.

Listen to me, Anne ; give me your hands—'t is I—
Mary, your friend, your sister ; look, dear ! look !

ANNE.

Oh, bless thee ! thou 'rt an angel, bless thee ! bless thee !
Thou 'rt come to take me out of torment ; take me !
Quick ! quick !

MARY.

Come, come.

ANNE.

Yes, I will go with thee.
Take hold of me, take care of me, good angel ;
Spread thy white wings over my burning eyes ;
So—all is dark—

MARY.

She's growing wondrous heavy ;
Help ! help ! within there ! ho !

[*Enter Servants.*

Take up your mistress,
And carry her to her chamber ; gently, gently.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE 3.

Room in a tavern in London ; JAMES FORRESTER discovered writing.

JAMES.

How bitter are the dregs ! the draught was swallow'd
So greedily, I scarce know if 't was sweet ;
But the sour and biting flavour of the lees
Lies on my palate. O thou moral dunce !
Whom teaching could not make retain thy task,
But who again hast fallen on a path
Measured so often with thy stumbling footsteps.
How deep I scorn myself ! from the high bar
Of mine own conscience slink I shamefully,

Judged of my thoughts. Why there is nothing, nothing
That is not worthier, steadfaster, more firm,
More true and constant to its purposes than I am.
A reed, a vane, feathers that show the wind,
All things unstable are poor types of me ;
For they, obeying their great natural law,
Do but their kind in changing ; while myself,
Owning one law, acknowledging one right,
Straight turn, and sin against mine own allowance,
And show myself herein most pitiful,
That not my reason or resolve can hold me
From the chance breath of every stray temptation.
Oh, I could strike my forehead on these boards !
Less dull ! less senseless ! less incapable !
And now to write to her :—what shall I say ?
' I love you.' Answers she not, ' You have proved it ?'
If I do beg her pardon, like an alms,
Given to one whose evil life hath beggar'd him,
Out of her Christian pity she shall give it,
And bid God help me to a better course.
If I do crave her hand, shall she not say :
' Yea, for the hope I have of restless days,
Nights, when you shall forsake my bed for the dice,
The sweet society of all your tavern friends,
And the fair chance of dying yet a beggar—
For all these pleasant prospects, I will marry you.'
' Sdeath ! I'll not write ; I've not the face ! or thus,
I yet will write, and bidding her consider

How desperately unworthy I am grown
Ever to see her, or to think of her,
Beseech her to forgive me, though for ever
She banish me from her sweet heart and mind,
A rude, ungovern'd outlaw from all grace.

[*Shouts of laughter without.*]

Now come my fellow fools ! and he, the devil
That leads the dance. Time was I loved this laughing ;
It sounds like howling now. Here comes the rout,
And even quiet thoughts must give them place.

[*Enter LORD ALFORD, WILTON, MOWBRAY,
ILLWORTH, and others.*]

ALFORD.

Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! and so they were too hard for thee
In Florence, Illworth ?

ILLWORTH.

Curse their Italian craft !

Their dice be devils.

ALFORD.

So are ours sometimes.

Ha, James ! what sayst thou ? are they not, good James ?

JAMES.

In your lordship's hands they are familiar devils,
That spoil men at your will ; but have a care !
They will be paid at last their fees by you.

ALFORD.

How now ! how now ! homilies at the hazard table ?
Gramercy, holy preacher ! is your text
From theory, or experience ?

JAMES.

From experience ;
As your lordship's purse might let you know.

WILTON.

That 's well !

If I were James, I 'd flay him !

MOWBRAY.

Why do n't you ?
He owes you just as much ; peace now, be still ;
Here 'll be a quarrel.

ALFORD.

Ha ! ha ! ha ! poor Forrester !
He 's stripp'd to the quick ; you 'd think he 'd pledged
his skin,
And lost it.

JAMES (*aside*).

Shall I take him by the throat ?

(*Aloud*).

Very well, sir,—'t is the winner's part to laugh.

ALFORD.

'T is very clear you 're not the winner, James ;
You look about to cry.

JAMES (*aside*).

'S death ! I will write to her,
And then end all at once.

ALFORD.

Come, Illworth, show us
The craft you spoke of : — how is it they play ?

ILLWORTH.

Why, they stand round the table, as it were—
Here, spread the table — now, where be the dice ?

MOWBRAY.

How many play at it ?

ILLWORTH.

Why, all who will.

WILTON.

Forrester, come and see this foreign trickery.

JAMES.

Thanks ! I have seen our English, which is good.

ALFORD.

Oh, let him be ! he's like a hen i' the pip,
Best in the corner where he's thrust himself :
Go on. Well then, they all stand round the table,
And here we are.

ILLWORTH.

Now each in turn shall say
What the cast shall be, and put the stake down on it.

WILTON.

Well, here's my stake — mark though, for thy example
Only.

OMNES.

Ha ! ha ! here, here's for thy example.

MOWBRAY.

Forrester, come and wager for example.

JAMES.

I have done so already, for your example ;
Let my loss be your gain.

ILLWORTH.

'T is a curious game, sir,
Well worth your eye.

FORRESTER.

'T is very likely, sir,
Yet pray excuse me.

ILLWORTH.

Even as you will.

ALFORD.

Come, James, ne'er mope; what though Sir John be come,
Has n't he slack'd the leading-strings yet?

JAMES.

Sir!

ALFORD.

Why God a mercy, friend! do n't eat me!

JAMES.

My lord,

Let me but put two words more to this paper,
And I will speak with you; by your good leave,
Let me be private for a moment.

ALFORD.

Certainly:

He's writing to his mistress; she's forbid him
To touch the dice — he's play'd, the naughty boy,
And now is begging to be spared his whipping.

JAMES (*aside*).

Very well, I hear you, — very well; within there.

MOWBRAY.

Come, Illworth, here — here lie our stakes all round.

[Enter a Servant.]

JAMES.

Send hither my man.

[Exit Servant.]

ILLWORTH.

Now, I will hold the dice,
And as you each call out the cast, that one,
Who names the number even as it falls,
Sweeps all away.

WILTON.

How if none hit the right?

ILLWORTH.

The stake is his that throws.

MOWBRAY.

But how, if two,
Or more, should say alike?

ILLWORTH.

If they hit right,
The profit lies between them.

ALFORD.

A pretty game!
Come now, begin.

[*Enter a Servant.*

JAMES.

Eustace, if presently,
My brother should come here, and I be — gone —
Or else — no matter, if I am not here,
Here is a letter for him, and hark in thine ear.

[*Whispers to him.*

EUSTACE.

I shall, sir.

JAMES.

Bring them now at once.

[*Exit EUSTACE.*

MOWBRAY.

Hallo !

I said 't was quatre ace, and so it is.
Fair play ! fair play ! good foreign conjuror !

ILLWORTH.

You did not say so — or I heard you not.

WILTON.

He did, he did, I heard him ; you, my Lord,
Did you not hear ?

ALFORD.

I never hear.

MOWBRAY.

No matter;

Hear or not hear who will, I swear I said it;

I said it, and, by Jove! I'll stand to it.

WILTON.

I heard you say it—

SEVERAL.

So did I, and I.

ILLWORTH.

Hoite toite ! cats in a high wind !

[Re-enter EUSTACE, bringing a case of pistols.]

EUSTACE.

Here, sir.

JAMES.

Are they loaded, primed, and ready? Very good.

You've got that letter for my brother? Here

Is one for Mistress Mary Winthrop. You

Will ride at break of day to the Judge's house,

And give it her—yourself; be sure, yourself.

EUSTACE.

Is your honour going on a journey?

JAMES.

Yes—

On a long journey, Eustace.

EUSTACE.

Please you, sir,

Nothing's prepared, or in fit order yet.

JAMES.

That's true, indeed! I know it very well!

Good Eustace, get thee gone; think of my letters.

What a hell's turmoil! get thee gone.

[*Exit* EUSTACE.]

ILLWORTH.

Let be,

Let him swear out his gizzard; what is't to me!

JAMES (*rising*).

Now, I am for you.

OMNES.

Forrester! Forrester!

Judge thou this matter!

JAMES.

No; pray pardon me;

I have a game to play on mine own account.

When that is over, I will hear this question.

ALFORD.

Why, well said ! Now, my melancholy man !
Hang it ; although thy good St. John of a brother—

JAMES.

Let be my brother, if you please, my lord.
Your lordship challenged me to throw the dice
Just now ; and so I would, but that indeed
You have fish'd clean to the bottom of my pouch,
And I have nothing left for you to sport with.

WILTON.

What ails that man ? D'ye mark how pale he looks ?

MOWBRAY.

That's what you call white heat—hotter than red.

ALFORD.

What, nothing ?

JAMES.

Nothing ; not the wherewithal,
Unless I sit at my brother's board, to get
My supper for to-night or morrow's dinner.
'T is a plain case ; nothing is right soon counted.
Now, having nothing for a mess of broth
To stay my stomach on when next I hunger,
What shall I venture against you, my good lord ?

ALFORD.

Will not thy credit serve thee with the Jews?

JAMES.

That's bye and bye; I would be playing now.

ALFORD.

What! nor thy generous brother lend thee a stiver!

JAMES.

Perhaps he might; but he is not at hand,
Although I look for him from hour to hour.
I would be playing now.

ALFORD.

I'll tell thee, James;
Thy manory of Wentworth—'t is a thought,
An excellent thought!—ha! ha! an excellent thought.

JAMES.

No doubt: what is 't?

ALFORD.

Thou hast it yet?—that farm?
With all its goodly meadow land, and timber,
The lusty growth that hath been rising there,
For thy necessity, these hundred years?

JAMES.

Yes, sir,

I have it yet ; (*aside*)—it should have been my home
When I was married, that old farm : (*aloud*)—well, sir ?

ALFORD.

Is 't mortgaged ?

JAMES.

No.

ALFORD.

What, sound ? no corner touched ?

JAMES.

That 's wonderful, my lord—is 't not to you ?

ALFORD.

Why, thou canst raise a fortune on it, man.

JAMES

Hereafter ; but I would be playing now.

OMNES.

I'll lend thee, Forrester !—or I !—or I !

JAMES.

Oh, thank ye ! thank ye ! honest gentlemen !

(*Aside*).

Good fellow gulls, have ye so much left to lend ?

ALFORD.

Hark, James, I'm bent to have that farm of thine.

JAMES.

Damn him ! my blood boils o'er in spite of myself !
With all my heart ; shall I make a deed of gift,
Or play for it with your lordship ?

ALFORD.

Deed of gift !

No, no ; thou 'rt jesting. Come, we'll throw for it.

JAMES.

With all my heart ; how shall the venture stand ?

ALFORD.

Thus : he that throws the two best casts of three,
Shall call it his, and if thou winn'st, it quits thee
Of all thou owest me. Is it agreed ?

JAMES.

Agreed ;

Upon a bargain, worthiest sir, that when
That game is o'er, you play another one
On my conditions.

ALFORD.

I will wager thee,
When thou hast lost thy farm, thou hast not left
The heart, to throw another die.

JAMES.

Then, sir,
I'll borrow yours. Your lordship's heart, d'ye hear
Which seems to be of the hardest that are made,
Your upright, noble, generous, kind heart.
Look, worthy Sir, who plays with desperate men
Must play a desperate game; do you see these?
These playthings here? here lie they at my hand.
Now, win or lose this manor, an ye list;
He that shall throw the two best casts of three,
When that is done, shall have first aim and fire.
An excellent thought, my lord! ha! ha! an excellent
thought.
Is it agreed?

ALFORD.

Agreed.

MOWBRAY.

What is 't you do?

WILTON.

James! for the love of heaven, play not this stake!

ILLWORTH.

Be counsell'd yet, sir —

WILTON.

James! James Forrester!

MOWBRAY.

He ne'er was known to lose.

ALFORD.

Nor will not now ;
Come, James, you 're angry; give this mad game o'er,
I do not care to throw with thee—

JAMES.

My lord,
I 'm ready.

MOWBRAY.

Some one run to his brother's lodging.

JAMES.

No one that loves me stir. Good gentlemen,
If any here are friends to an unthrift,
That never yet was friend unto himself,
Stand by, and see fair play ; 't is all I ask.
Now then, sir, throw ; trois, quatre !

ALFORD.

And trois, ace !
You 've the better, sir.

JAMES.

Again, doublets !

ALFORD.

Trois, six !

Now for the third ; trois, quatre !

JAMES.

Quatre, ace !

The manor's yours ! now, Sir, we'll try how long
You shall enjoy it.

WILTON.

This is murder !

[Enter SIR JOHN FORRESTER.

Oh !

Thank God you've come ! here is your brother James
Playing with that thief of a lord for his life.

FORRESTER.

Stand by ;

Hush ! stand awhile, and speak not !

WILTON.

Sir, the stake

Is who shall have first aim, and fire at the other !

FORRESTER.

Peace, for awhile ! let's see.

ALFORD.

Give up the rest.

JAMES.

Play my lord, play ! deux, ace !

ALFORD.

Why, take it then,
Fool, an thou wilt ! trois, deux !

MOWBRAY.

This is most horrible !

JAMES.

Our merry game will presently be over,
You 've the best of me ; trois, quatre !

ALFORD.

Trois, deux ! so,
Thou 'st yet one chance of living to grow wiser,
Improve it, James, if thou should'st win the match.

JAMES.

Trois, quatre !

ALFORD.

Quatre, cinq !

FORRESTER (*striking him*).

Villain and thief !

That die is loaded !

OMNES.

Loaded ! a loaded die !

Seize on it !—prove it !

ALFORD.

Your greeting's short, and short
Is my reply—take that !

[Fires a pistol at him.]

FORRESTER.

Oh ! I am dead !

OMNES.

Secure him !

Call the watch !

JAMES (*seizing the other pistol*).

Devil !

FORRESTER (*wrests it from him*).

No ! you shall do no murder,
To wound me worse than this leaden death within me.
What ! shall he die by the hand of a gentleman
Who hath lived like a felon ?

ALFORD.

How shalt thou prevent it ?

FORRESTER.

James! I do charge thee with this latest breath,
Whose ebbing checks my speech, pursue that man
To the very utmost limit of the law,
And spare him not; but let his noble name
Receive at the high tribunal of his peers
The dignities himself hath graced it with,
Of dicer—murderer—and thief!

WILTON.

The watch!

The city watch!

MOWBRAY.

Call them!

ALFORD.

Ha! let me pass!

MOWBRAY.

They are knocking now.

ALFORD.

Let me pass, I say!

[Enter the Watch.]

WILTON.

They're here!

Take your precedence, noble sir, to the gallows!

MOWBRAY.

Good master officer! here's been a murder
Done in broad day, before us all, ev'n now;
Here lies a gentleman, wounded to death
By this lord; we all can witness to the deed.

WILTON.

Further, here lie the dice his lordship uses—
Curious ones.

OFFICER.

Will you follow?

ALFORD.

Fellow, keep off!

WILTON.

To be sure; don't touch him, he's a lord! I hope
They'll hang his lordship with a silken rope.

ALFORD.

Cowardly cur! that durst not show thy teeth
Till the bear was noosed!

OFFICER.

Come, sir, will you walk?

ALFORD.

Go on.

Farewell, sweet sirs! I've lived upon ye all
For some time past; 't is fit I thank you for 't:

So, thank ye, excellent fools, that I have fed on.
God send ye wits, to cram your bellies with,
And mend the holes I've made in your estates.

JAMES.

Hence! take him hence!

[*Exeunt ALFORD and Watch.*

Wilt thou be carried home?

Canst thou move?

FORRESTER.

No!—I fear time scarce will serve.

James, do not mourn, nor let thy spirit grieve
That I am dead. I often, in my life,
Did marvel to what use or end I lived;
I know it now, and die rejoiced to think of it,
Henceforth my blood, and not these painted spots,
Will speak the dice that thou shalt look upon;
And thou shalt fear to rattle them again,
As if they were my bones. The blood has soaked
All through my doublet: raise me up—O God!
Farewell, poor brother! Weep not! weep not! weep
not!

[*He dies.*

JAMES.

Oh, sirs, he's dead!

MOWBRAY.

James, we will carry him

Home in our arms: have comfort, sir!—so—so—

Flesh never wrapp'd a nobler soul than his.
Bear we his body honourably hence,
Whose memory shall live in our hearts for ever.

[*Exeunt, bearing the body.*]

SCENE 4.

A room in WINTHROP'S house.

ANNE *sitting by the window*, MARY *watching her*.

ANNE.

The shadow has crept on.

MARY.

Why do you watch it so?
You have scarcely turn'd your eyes for the last half-
hour ;
What do you see ?

ANNE.

Oh, is it half-an-hour ?
The light is almost swallow'd up by the shade.

MARY.

What light ? what shade ? Say, love, what are you
watching ?

ANNE.

The evening sun upon the gravel walk,
And the shadow of that yew tree.

MARY.

What do you start at ?

ANNE.

Come here and look.

MARY.

What is 't ? ah ! now I see.

ANNE.

Did you see that shadow ?

MARY.

Yes, my brother's shadow.

Is this why every day, as the sun goes down,
You sit at this window, straining your poor eyes ;
Is it to see his shadow as he walks ?

ANNE.

Methinks, each evening, it stoops more and more,
Inclining to the grave I have dug for him.
Oh ! if the light could only shine there still,
And he still walk, and I still see his shadow !
But the sun is almost set. Mary, does he walk
After sunset ever ?

MARY.

Oh, yes, till after midnight
He oft continues pacing up and down.

ANNE.

Oh ! if I could but hear his feet on the ground
After the darkness takes away his shadow !
I am too bold to dare to wish so much ;
Do you not think so ?

MARY.

No, dear ; let me smooth
This pillow underneath your cheek ; how fares it ?

ANNE.

Dying—dying ; thou shalt soon, O thou sweet saint !
Minister to my misery no more.
For thy compassion and humility
In tending one so vile, God will requite thee.
My lips have lost the power to speak blessings.
The shadow eats the light up, inch by inch ;
Ah, cruel, cruel !

MARY.

Lay your head down,—so ;
You can still watch the sunset. You grow paler ;
Art worse ?

ANNE.

No, but the warmth about my heart
Seems dying out with that departing light.
'T is gone ; never again ! never again !

MARY.

This is the time when you are wont to sleep :
Come, shut those eyes up, that they drop no tears.
Come, I will sing to you.

ANNE.

Thy song shall be
My dirge : let it be solemn, slow, and sad ;
On earth I shall never hear sweet music more.

MARY.

Do you lie easily ?

ANNE.

Yes : I shall slide
Even from this very chair into my grave.
Is it dug deep ? will it hide my sin and shame ?
Sing, seraph, sing, while I sink down into it.
Sleep holds me ; I do think I shall not wake.

MARY (*sings*).

Sleep, do not dream—dream not, but only rest,
Poor weary heart ! forget thou art alive.
God's mercy holds thee as a mother's breast.
Cease, thou sad soul, to suffer and to strive.
Dream not, but sleep—sleep through the dismal night :
Beloved, when thou wak'st it shall be light.

Fast ! fast ! how pale ! how thin ! oh, misery !
How changed ! she surely is about to die.

And shall my brother look on her no more ?
That sweet young wife that he did dote on so !
Shall he see her body carried out from the door,
But never her ? Oh, I will fetch him hither !
He 'll surely, surely come to see her once —
But once before she dies. Oh, what a life
Has mine become ! who thus, from day to day,
Stand here between them both, watching them waste
And waste with sorrow ; all mine own poor hopes
Wreck'd on the treacherous coast of a light love ;
And the summer morning of my happiness
Covered with weeping clouds and darkness.

ANNE.

Husband !

MARY.

It is the first time she has spoke that word.
Call'st thou upon him, poor heart, in thy sleep,
Whom waking thou dost almost quake to think on ?
Yea—he shall come once more to answer thee,
Once more to hear thee speak ; soft—soft—no noise.

[*Exit* MARY.[*Music plays while ANNE sleeps.*

ANNE.

Sweet music ! heavenly strains ! my soul is borne
Upon your gentle stream away—away.
There is forgiveness for the broken spirit.
Thou Merciful ! forgive—forgive—forgive—

[*Enter MARY and WINTHROP.*

MARY.

Lean on me, do—do—while you tremble so.
Gently; don't wake her; she is yet asleep;
Do not go near to her. Oh, pray!

WINTHROP.

Sin—sin—

Could there be any death else?

MARY.

O brother!

Now you are here, I fear what I have done.
Begone again before she wakes.

WINTHROP.

So young!

But one short draught of life, and so much bitter;
And now the cup is rudely snatch'd from thee,
And dust thrust in thy mouth!

MARY.

Come, come away,

If she does wake, the sudden sight of you
Will kill her.

WINTHROP.

In a little while this body,
The temple once of beauty, oh, how rare!

Now desecrated, ruin'd, and forsaken,
Shall be hid in the earth; they'll lay her i' the ground,
And I shall walk upon it still, and feel
The sun.

MARY.

O brother! if she wakes, have pity!
Be kind to her!

WINTHROP.

Be kind to her! O God!

MARY.

Hush! hush!

WINTHROP.

I have done this—I've murder'd her!
I, that must covet this fair flower, and snatch it
Out from the sunny garden where it grew,
To wither in an old man's wintry bosom!
That could not see, but push'd her tottering steps
Even to the dizzy verge of steep temptation.
But, oh! but, oh! she seem'd to me so excellent,
I did not recollect that she was mortal.

MARY.

Peace, she awakes! Stand from her sight awhile.
How is it, sweet? has thy sleep cheer'd thee?

ANNE.

Yes.

My spirit stands a tip-toe to begone ;
Accursed fear has fled away for ever ;
I am at peace. To have seen my husband once—
Once to have heard him utter ‘ I forgive thee—’

WINTHROP.

I do forgive thee, wife ! I do forgive thee !
So Heaven have mercy on me, as I do
Forgive thee with all my soul !

[ANNE falls from her chair.]

MARY.

You have been too sudden ;
Her spirit hath hurried all affrighted hence.

[WINTHROP raises her.]

ANNE.

Oh, bless thee, bless thee, noble heart !

WINTHROP.

And thou,

Forgive thou me for having married thee
Unto conditions so unlike thine own.
Forgive my having thrust thee to the brink
And desperate precipice of thy temptation.
Forgive my sternness, and unyielding temper,
And all the rugged harshness of my nature.

ANNE.

Death, the divorcer, marries us anew.
When I am cold, and carried to that bed
That knows no fellowship, upon my hand
Put thou once more my wedding-ring—i' the church—
Put it upon my finger once again.

WINTHROP.

I will.

MARY.

Footsteps draw near; one knocks.

JAMES (*without*).

'T is I!

MARY.

O Heaven!

ANNE.

That is James Forrester; let him come in.

MARY.

No! no!

ANNE.

Let him come in.

WINTHROP (*opens the door*).

Come in; you're welcome
To this solemn house, where death, with icy hands,
Is slackening all our dearest knots of life.

JAMES.

To such a house come I a fitting guest.
Behold my sable garb, and hear the sum
Of my great loss in few poor words: my brother
Is dead.

MARY.

Alas!

WINTHROP.

Sorrow comes thick on sorrow!
We shall be stripp'd.

JAMES.

Of the manner of the death,
Which leaves me lonely in the world, I'll tell ye
Anon; a devil—that devil Alford—slew him;
And yet I am his murderer.

MARY.

Hold! hold!

These news have stunn'd her; why, how pale, how still!
Brother, raise your arm, her head has fallen on it;
She sleeps.

WINTHROP.

Yes, the cold sleep; she will not wake
Till the dead wake, for she is dead.

JAMES.

O Heaven !

WINTHROP.

Two of the jewels of my life are gone ;
The one, most precious, flaw'd, and stolen from me ;
The other, seized, and rudely cast away.
Both by one hand—may God requite its dealings.
What now remains, but that I take my last,
And giving that away—like to a beggar
Whose scrip is empty, and whose alms are spent,
Stretch out my limbs, and die.

MARY.

Oh, brother ! brother !
Are these the words with which you give me forth
To my new fortunes ? Miserable maiden !
What joy shall ever smile upon my fate,
Whose earliest hours of love, and of betrothment,
Are spent amidst sights of death and sounds of mourn-
ing ?

WINTHROP.

No, my sweet Mary—no, my darling child !
I am to blame, to blame, but bear with me ;
And in the embers of my heart I 'll rake,
And find some warmth there yet, to bless thee with.

Thy marriage peal shall be no funeral knell,
Nor shall a pall o'erhang thy bridal bed ;
Let pass these days of mourning, and again,
Before I die, I 'll smile to bid thee joy.

JAMES.

Cheer thee, dear love ! comfort, my gentle Mary !

WINTHROP.

Come and live with me, here, until I die ;
You are my heiress, all is here your own.
The waters of my life have run to bitterness,
And the failing fountain trickles cold and slow.
Let its last ebbing drops fall in the sunshine
Of your sweet love and holy happiness.

END OF

‘AN ENGLISH TRAGEDY.’

MARY STUART.

TRANSLATED

FROM THE GERMAN OF SCHILLER.

TO

HENRY GREVILLE, Esq.

This translation, the completion of which is chiefly due to his kind encouragement, is dedicated by his obliged and attached friend,

THE AUTHOR.

Non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu . . . non assidere litteræ dormitanti, sed quasi captivos sensus in suam linguam victoris jure transponere.

ST JEROME, 101st *Letter to Pammachias on the
best method of translating.*

INTRODUCTION.

THE pleasure I derived from Mdlle. Rachel's performance of the French version of Schiller's 'Mary Stuart,' induced me to undertake a translation of that piece for the English stage. On comparing it with the work of the great German poet, however, it appeared to me so much less worthy of the labour I was prepared to bestow upon it, that I determined to attempt an English version of the original tragedy, satisfied that it would be easy to reduce it to acting dimensions, and adapt it to the English stage, by following the plan of the French author, and retaining nothing of Schiller's work but what was essentially dramatic and effective, and bore direct relation to the heroine herself.

The French play, though not a work of remarkable poetical merit, does credit to the good taste and judgement of the author as an adaptation to the French stage. M. Mercier has selected with considerable tact, out of the great store of materials opened to him in Schiller's noble work, what would make an effective and touching 'acting play,' eminently calculated to display histrionic power, and excite the sympathy of an audience,—perhaps I should have said, eminently favourable to a display of the peculiar genius of any great actress representing Mary Stuart, the

Bewundert viel und viel gescholten Helena

of modern Europe ; for of late years that part alone has been deemed worthy of the powers of a first-rate performer, though when the piece was first produced in Paris, and Mdle. Duchesnois, in spite of her ' style larmoyant,' and of her being the ugliest woman in France, charmed and touched all hearts as the representative of Mary, the part of Elizabeth received its due importance from the fine acting of Madame Paradol ; and Talma himself did not disdain to represent that type of cowardly courtier craft, Leicester.

In Schiller's play, the interest of Mary's situation is so equally balanced by the consummate skill with which he has drawn the character of Elizabeth, that I do not wonder at the great German actress, who is said to have displayed her varied powers alternately in the two parts. We can imagine Mdle. Rachel a terribly true Elizabeth, and Madame Ristori has proved by her alternate representation of Schiller's Mary, and the Elizabeth of the curious Italian play founded on the life of the Tudor Queen, that she combines the subtle mental powers and keen intellectual force requisite to impersonate the English princess with all the grace, dignity, and tenderness which are the traditional attributes of her Scottish rival.

With its peculiar fitness for the French stage ends, however, I think, the merit of M. Mercier's tragedy. It no more represents Schiller's noble dramatic chronicle, which may be called history set to poetry, than the adaptation of Hamlet by M. Ducis can claim to represent Shakespeare's great work.

The French ' Mary Stuart ' is what every other French tragic drama was before the time of M. Victor Hugo's daring inauguration of the so-called *École Romantique* on the Paris stage ; a set of circumstances peculiar to that play, with a set of characters common to all French plays in general—the ' Mesdames et Seigneurs ' of the Spanish ' Cid ' of Corneille,

the Jewish 'Athalie' of Racine, and the Grecian 'Merope' of Voltaire.

In his delineations of Mary Stuart, Schiller has shown the appreciation of genius for the value of truth, and with excellent judgement, by making her in the very opening of the play confess her complicity in the murder of Darnley, and the subsequent disgraceful elevation of Bothwell, he silences the the main accusations that could be brought against her, and to a certain extent disarms the reprobation that might conflict with the interest he wishes us to feel for her.

She pleads guilty at the very outset, and begins with the humility of a penitent the course of patient suffering, which he makes her close with the constancy of a martyr reiterating the same confession of her early guilt. This is masterly; for in the first scene the admission of her crime inclines us to dismiss it with a certain leniency in consideration of the severity of her punishment, and in the last her repetition of the charge, which she admits, strengthens mightily the denial of the subsequent ones brought against her by her enemies.

While thus happily evading the impression of personal detestation for these actions, and insisting with infinite pathos upon the cruelty and injustice of the treatment Mary experienced in England, Schiller shows with the utmost force and truth the circumstances which rendered her imprisonment and execution a political necessity, a measure of inevitable self-preservation on the part of the British Government, and vividly describes the incessant dangers and disturbances with which her mere existence threatened England and Elizabeth.

The scattered rays of historical testimony are gathered into a poetical focus of light by his genius, and the creation of the character of Mortimer is the embodiment of all the sinister and furious antagonism, the unscrupulous and implacable

hatred with which the dawn of our civil and religious liberty, power, and prosperity was menaced by the life of Mary Stuart.

Not Mr. Froude himself, the zealous champion of the Tudor sovereigns (father and daughter), has drawn a more faithful and powerful picture of the perpetual alarms with which the Queen and country were shaken by the pretensions of the Scottish princess and the intrigues of her foreign kindred; and though, in his review of Mignet's damnatory history of Mary, he has treated her with the rancour of a partisan rather than the impartial reprobation of an historian, he has not surpassed, in his estimate of the mischiefs he attributes to her influence, the impression we derive of them from Schiller's play.

On the other hand, nothing short of the poet's vivid illustration of Elizabeth's precarious position could mitigate, to any tolerable degree, the odiousness of the lineaments with which he has portrayed her. But while, with infinite skill, he compels us to admit the necessity of Mary's execution, he makes the agency of Elizabeth in it, and her mode of exerting that agency, the result of a combination of personal motives of the basest and most detestable nature; and if Mr. Froude may applaud the German poet's masterly description of Elizabeth's circumstances, Dr. Lingard, and every Roman Catholic chronicler before and since him, might rejoice in the character he has traced of the great heretic sovereign whom they delight to decry.

The admirers of powerful dramatic situations will hardly quarrel with the bold violation of history which procures him the scene of the meeting of the two Queens; and the lover of exquisite poetry will forgive, for the sake of the pathetic beauty of Mary's outburst of ecstasy on finding herself at liberty in the Park of Fotheringay, the inaccurate geographical

knowledge which makes her discover the hills of Scotland and navigable waters that bathe the shores of France in the midland county of Northamptonshire. This scene is generally considered the climax of the play in representation, and throws into comparative insignificance even the melancholy interest of the last act. The one which follows it was judiciously omitted by M. Mercier from his adaptation, and should undoubtedly be omitted in any English acting version of the play; for there is a coarse cruelty in the outrage offered to Mary by the insane fanatic Mortimer of which it would be difficult to make an English audience acquiescent spectators: nor can I imagine the genius of the greatest actress that ever lived investing either with dignity or grace the terror and disgust of a woman helplessly compelled to listen to such insults.

The character of Mortimer is a powerful and true exponent of the peculiar class of men of whom the ranks of the Catholic party in England were then mainly composed, and from whom Mary's unscrupulous foreign partisans recruited their appropriate instruments; but in the treatment of it, and more particularly in the developement of his passion for Mary, we recognise the element of not very legitimate power, by which all Europe was thrilled and fascinated on the first production of Schiller's 'Robbers;' an element which betrays itself in some degree in all his plays, and which made the arch-critic Goethe accuse him of a 'love for the horrible,' when he resisted Schiller's desire to have Alva introduced in the last scene of 'Egmont,' a triumphant and malignant witness of his execution. Schiller had a more poetical nature than Goethe, but he had not the fastidious exquisiteness of taste which the great courtier poet possessed above any man that universal literature can show—a faculty which he had cultivated into such unerring perfection that we are tempted to consider it a natural gift, and to hold it the greatest of all his

great endowments ; forgetting, perhaps, that while it checked all excesses of intellectual extravagance, it dwarfed the growth of moral excellence, and ended by substituting the perception of beauty for the love of God and man.

Of the scene between Melville and Mary, where she confesses and receives the sacrament, it can only be said, that it is impossible for English people of the present day to conceive of such subjects being made matters of theatrical representation ; for in spite of the violation of all artistic propriety, and propriety much more serious than that which is merely artistic, by the mode in which it is now the fashion to represent the spectacle of human dissolution in all its terrible and revolting details—a sight round which awe and tenderness alike draw the curtains of reverent silence and darkness, and of which common respect for our common mortality should forbid the gross mimicry upon a stage—it is to be presumed, that it will still be long before the most holy sacrament of the Christian religion is considered a legitimate subject for dramatic exhibition in an English theatre.

In reading Schiller's play this scene is one of the most touching, and of course the most solemn, in the whole composition. I think, however, that the objection which I applied to the last scene between Mary and Mortimer of being too horrible and shocking one's sensibility unnecessarily, is applicable also to Leicester's soliloquy after Mary's departure to execution ; it jars upon the elevated pathos of her farewell like a harsh and violent discord at the close of some strain of celestial melancholy music. The exit of the Queen to her death after her parting words of tender forgiveness to her lover brings the pathos of the story to its legitimate dramatic climax.

As the stage does not (and very properly) present to us the spectacle of her execution, the description of it by Leicester as

he gathers its process from the sounds beneath the floor, adds nothing to our pity for the Queen, whose moral agony we have witnessed, and whose subsequent physical agony has the effect of a coarse bathos after the keener trial through which we have just seen her triumphant passage, while it disturbs with images of merely material horror the sad and sweet serenity of her heroic acquiescence in her fate. If it is urged that the miserable weakness and worldliness of Leicester deserve the retribution of such a situation, we can only say that he has by this time become as indifferent to us as to Mary, and that his tardy repentance and anguish can excite no sympathy after that which has been called forth by her.

As detached portions of Schiller's work, the finest in every respect, I think, are Mary's entrance in the Park of Fotheringay, when the break of the blank verse into exquisite lyrics is at once most poetical, beautiful, and natural; Mortimer's description, in his first scene with Mary, of his conversion to Romanism; and Elizabeth's soliloquy before signing the death-warrant. The second is a wonderfully beautiful description of the peculiar fascinations of that Church which alone of all Christian Churches warrants and comprehends the application of all means to its own ends; the last is a masterly delineation of the great agony of contending motives to which Schiller represents Elizabeth a prey, and which reaches its overwhelming climax in this scene by the preponderance of those which urge her to sign Mary's sentence.

The beauty of Schiller's plays consists chiefly in the power of the dramatic situations, and in the force with which the characters are delineated; the latter are generally, whether good or bad, of lofty ideal proportions, and the language in which they converse, always elevated and admitting no comic admixture, is rather dignified and declamatory than passionate, imaginative, or poetical. For these reasons Schiller's plays are by no means among the most difficult works that a trans-

lator can attempt to render in another language. The striking situations, the strongly-marked and rather stiffly-outlined characters, and the measured march of the stately style, present fewer difficulties than works in which the form of expression divides the reader's admiration with the thought or feeling expressed,—such as Schiller's exquisite lyrics, of which the grace and sentiment, no less than the peculiar charm of diction, evaporate easily in the process of pouring from one language to another their subtle essence.

The respective merits of free and literal translation have been too often discussed for me to attempt deciding a question which every author naturally answers in favour of the style he has himself adopted; I have not intentionally followed either theory exclusively, but have rendered literally what appeared to me best so rendered, and with more freedom what seemed to lose force and expression by too absolutely verbal translation.

The poetical 'Thou' with which Schiller makes all who approach Elizabeth address her, is too opposed to all our ideas to be retained throughout, though I have allowed it to remain in the situations where the excitement of strong feeling might render it less strange and incongruous to the English reader; for though the Queen's Majesty did undoubtedly write letters to my Lord Leicester beginning 'Dear Rob,' the most assured persuasion of his great favour with his mistress would hardly have suggested to that nobleman that it might 'not be amiss if thou thoust her' occasionally.

To conclude, German scholars, or those who are only so much of German scholars as to be able to read Schiller's plays, will probably not read my translation, and will certainly not be satisfied with it, for I am not; and yet I have done as well as I could, and may perhaps venture to recommend my work to those who cannot read the original, as a tolerably faithful and not altogether inadequate rendering of Schiller's noble play.

Dramatis Personæ.

BURLEIGH, LORD HIGH TREASURER.

ROBERT DUDLEY, EARL OF LEICESTER.

TALBOT, EARL OF SHREWSBURY.

THE EARL OF KENT.

SIR AMIAS PAULET.

MORTIMER, *his Nephew.*

O'KELLY, *a Catholic Priest.*

DAVISON, *the Queen's Secretary.*

COUNT D'AUBESPINE, *French Ambassador.*

BELLIEVRE, *Envoy from the DUKE OF ANJOU.*

MELVIL, *Steward of the Household to QUEEN MARY.*

BURGOYNE, *her Physician.*

Lords, Gentlemen, Sheriff, Officers, Guards, &c.

ELIZABETH, QUEEN OF ENGLAND.

MARY STUART, QUEEN OF SCOTLAND.

HANNAH KENNEDY, *her Nurse.*

MARGARET KURL, *her Woman.*

Other Women attending on MARY STUART.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A room in Fotheringay Castle. HANNAH KENNEDY, the Queen of Scotland's Nurse; SIR AMIAS PAULET about to force open an escritoir; DRURY, his assistant, is beside him with implements for forcing locks.

KENNEDY.

What mean you, sir, by this new outrage?—hence,
Nor dare t' invade this shrine.

PAULET.

Whence came this gold?

'T was thrown from above—doubtless to tempt
The gard'ner's honesty. Cursed woman's craft!
Spite of my strict and oft-repeated search,
Yet hidden hoards, yet secret means of mischief.
Where this lay hid more doubtless are conceal'd.

KENNEDY.

Audacious, hence! 't is the Queen's private casket.

PAULET.

And therefore likeliest holds that which I seek.

[Drawing forth papers.]

KENNEDY.

Papers without significance or value;
The mere creations of an idle pen
To cheat the dreary leisure of her prison.

PAULET.

The devil finds business for such idleness.

KENNEDY.

They are writ in French, sir.

PAULET.

All the worse, good madam ;
It is the tongue of England's enemies.

KENNEDY.

The copy of a letter to your queen.

PAULET.

I will deliver it. See ! what shines here ?
A royal frontlet set with precious gems,
And wrought with the *fleur-de-lis* of France—here,
Drury,
Take it, and lay it with the rest.

[*Exit* DRURY.]

KENNEDY.

Must we endure this shameful violence ?

PAULET.

So long as she possesses anything,
She's to be fear'd ; there's nothing but becomes
A weapon in her hands.

KENNEDY.

Good sir, have pity ;
Strip her not of this last remaining treasure.
Th' unfortunate cheats her dark present fortune
With this poor relic of her former greatness,
For you have taken from her all but this.

PAULET.

'T is in safe hands ; and at a fitting time
Will scrupulously be restored to her.

KENNEDY.

O Heavens ! who, beholding these bare walls,
Could e'er believe a queen had such a dwelling ?
No royal dais above her seat ; no covering
To keep the rough ground from her delicate feet.
With coarse and scanty tin her table served,
No poorest gentlewoman but is costlier furnish'd.

PAULET.

'T was thus her husband's board was spread in Stirling,
While she pledged her gallants in cups of gold.

KENNEDY.

Not e'en a mirror's needful ornament.

PAULET.

No ; for while she can gaze on her vain image
She will not cease to venture and to hope.

KENNEDY.

No book with wise discourse to cheer her spirit.

PAULET.

She has her Bible, that will cleanse her heart.

KENNEDY.

Her lute ta'en from her, whose kind voice did comfort
her

With long-remember'd strains.

PAULET.

Ay, with lewd love-songs.

KENNEDY.

Is this the fate reserved for her who seem'd
Born to be fortune's darling—queen from her cradle—
Rear'd in the splendour of the Medici's court,
Where in an atmosphere of joy she flourish'd?
Is't not enough to rob her of all power?
Must you strip bare her life of every solace?
The load of a great sorrow teaches greatness—
Strength to endure—but the noblest courage fails
From day to day 'neath petty injuries.

PAULET.

Let her divorce her thoughts from vanity.
A life of wanton pomp and luxury
Is best atoned by lowly penitence.

KENNEDY.

And if her youth fail'd to resist temptation,
That lies between her conscience and her God.
England affords no judge with whom she reckons.

PAULET.

Where she has sinn'd there too will she be judged.

KENNEDY.

Your prison bars allow scant room for sinning.

PAULET.

Scant as the room, she has found it wide enough
Thence to stretch forth her arm and hurl abroad
Into our land the torch of civil discord,
And 'gainst our queen, whom God defend, to turn
Th' assassin's steel. From these close prison walls,
Did she not summon Babington and Parry
To the accursed guilt of regicide?
Did her strait fetters hinder her from weaving
Her wily nets round Norfolk's noble heart?
An offering to her craft, fell the best head
In all this land beneath the headsman's stroke;
Nor scared his bloody fate from the same abyss
Those other madmen that she beckon'd to it.
The scaffold loads itself with daily victims,
Given to death for her; nor will this end
Till she, the guilty cause of guilt, ascends it.

Curse on the day when first our shores received
This queen of guiles, this Helen as their guest!

KENNEDY.

Yea, guest-like, with true hospitality,
Has England welcomed the unfortunate,
Who, since the day she landed on your coast,
A fugitive and suppliant, seeking succour
From kindred blood, 'gainst kings' and nations' rights
Is held a prisoner here; in darkest durance,
Has wept away the fair years of her youth;
The dreary hours of her imprisonment
Steeped in the very dregs of bitterness.
And now as a common felon call'd to stand
Before your judgment-bar, arraign'd and question'd,
Challenged to answer for her life—a queen!

PAULET.

Peace! she came hither reeking red with blood,
Hunted by her own people from the throne
That she had stain'd with murder; hither came she,
Sworn enemy to England's weal, to bring
The bloody times of Spanish Mary back,
To make our country popish o'er again,
And give 't into the Frenchman's hand to spoil!
Why has she obstinately still refused
To sign the treaty drawn at Edinburgh?
Her idle claims why doth she not forego,

And with one stroke of the pen unbar her prison ?
No ; she loves better to lie groaning here
Over the much misuse that tries her virtue,
Than to renounce an empty title's boast,
Because she looks to free herself by summoning
The devil of conspiracy to her aid,
And, weaving her poisonous nets with subtle industry,
Entangle in their meshes the whole land.

KENNEDY.

Sure sir, you jest ! — a bitter biting jest—
That lends such dreams to one buried alive,
To whom hope breathes no whisper ; whom can reach
No friendly voice from her far distant home ;
Who since long years beholds no human face
Save that of her stern gaoler ; who within
The last few days sees herself watch'd and guarded
By a new spy, your rude unmanner'd kinsman ;
And still new bars to her iron cage are added.

PAULET.

No iron bars can cage her cunning spirit.
What know I but these prison bars are filed,
Ready to break asunder at a touch ;
This floor, these walls, that outwardly seem fast,
Bored through to let in treachery while I sleep ?
Accursed office fallen to my lot,
O'er this ill-brooding mischief to keep watch !

Fear hunts me up from sleep ; all night I walk
Like an unquiet ghost about my castle
To see if the bars be fast and the guard waking ;
And trembling I behold each morning break,
Lest it make good the worst of my forebodings.
But it is well—there is some hope 't will end ;
For I would rather watch the damn'd in hell
Than this pernicious Queen.

KENNEDY.

She's here herself.

PAULET.

The crucifix in her hand, and in her heart
Worldliness, wantonness, and boundless pride.

[*Enter MARY with a rosary in her hand ;*
KENNEDY goes towards her.

KENNEDY.

Oh, madam, we are trampled under foot ;
Hard-hearted tyranny knows no more bounds ;
And every day heaps some new injury
On your uncrowned head !

MARY.

What is it, Hannah ?

What has befallen ?

KENNEDY.

See, see here ! your casket
Broke open ! all your papers ! and the last

Poor treasure with such love and reverence guarded,
Sole remnant of your princely bridal gear,
Lie in his hands. Now you have nothing left ;
Nothing of all your royal dower—nothing !

MARY.

Be comforted ; these toys are not my royalty.
We may be basely used, but not made base.
Much have I learnt in England to endure ;
I can bear this. Sir, you have violently
Seized upon that which I had willingly
To-day deliver'd to you. Among those papers
Is a letter to my royal sister ; give me
Your knightly word that you 'll deliver it
To her own hand, not to the hand of Burleigh.

PAULET.

I will bethink me how to deal with it.

MARY.

Sir, you shall know its import. In it
I crave a weighty boon—even to have speech
With her own self, whom I have ne'er beheld.
By men have I been judged, whom I admit not
My peers, nor know how I should answer. She—
Elizabeth—is of my blood, my rank, my sex ;
And unto her—a kinswoman, a queen,
A woman—can I utter my whole mind.

PAULET.

Madam, you 've often trusted fate and honour
To men less worthy of your good respect.

MARY.

Another grace have I besought, which surely
Sheer inhumanity alone denies me.
Long in my prison have I been deprived
Of the holy Church's comfortable sacrament :
Those who have robb'd me of my crown and freedom,
And threaten now my life, yet surely seek not
To shut the door of Heaven against my soul.

PAULET.

Whene'er you choose, the chaplain of the castle—

MARY.

No ; I will have no chaplain of your castle,
But a priest of mine own faith. Moreover,
Some counsellors and men versed in the law
To help me order my last testament.
The wasting tooth of this long prison sorrow
Gnaws at my life ; I fear my days are counted,
And I would settle all things as for death.

PAULET.

That shall not be amiss ; such cares become
The case in which you stand.

MARY.

Nay, who shall tell me
That this too tedious dungeon martyrdom
May not be shorten'd by impatient hands?
My last will, therefore, I'll set down, bequeathing
Lawfully what is mine to whom I will.

PAULET.

You may do so; the Queen of England, madam,
Will scarce enrich herself by plundering you.

MARY.

I have from all my loving gentlewomen
And faithful gentlemen been separated.
What has become of them? their services
You have indeed constrain'd me to forego,
But I would fain know how it fares with them.

PAULET.

Madam, your household has been fitly cared for.

[He is going.]

MARY.

Are you departing, sir, without one word
To calm this terrible strife of doubt and fear,
Beneath whose joint assaults my spirit quails—
Not one poor word to lift from off my heart
The deadly load of this uncertainty?

Thanks to the watchfulness of your spies, I am
From the whole universe cut off; no tidings
Even of my own doom can pierce these walls.
My life lies in the hand of mine enemies.
A month of dreary hours has oozed away
Since hither came your Lords Commissioners;
Here, in this castle, like fate falling on me,
A court convened with sudden haste—myself
Cited to appear before it, unprepared
By warning—unprovided with defence.
Amazed beyond the use of my own faculties,
I stood before an unknown tribunal, hearing
Their cunningly framed and heavy accusations.
Like ghosts they rose before me, and so vanish'd;
And from that day terrible silence dwells
Upon all lips. In vain I seek in your eyes
To read if mine innocence and my friends' zeal
Or the hatred of mine enemies has prevail'd.
Oh, break this hideous spell, and let me know
What yet remains to fear, or what to hope!

PAULET (*after a pause*).

Make your account with Heaven.

MARY.

I trust

In Heaven's mercy, and I also trust
In the justice of my earthly judges.

PAULET.

Doubt not,

All justice will be done you.

MARY.

Is my trial

Concluded, sir?

PAULET.

I know not.

MARY.

Is it possible

They have condemn'd me?

PAULET.

Madam, I do not know.

MARY.

You are apt to make quick work, I know : belike
My murder, like my trial, may be sudden.

PAULET.

Think that it may be so ; so shall you stand
With a spirit better arm'd for the event.

MARY.

Nothing can move my wonder, sir, decreed
By the court in Westminster, urged on to sentence me

By Burleigh's hate and Hatton's zeal ; yet know I
Some things the Queen of England may not dare.

PAULET.

From the Parliament and their own consciences
Our sovereigns hold their limit of authority ;
And that which justice lawfully decrees,
Fearless of the whole world they will fulfill.

[*Enter MORTIMER, who addresses PAULET without
appearing to notice the QUEEN.*

MORTIMER.

You're wanted, uncle.

[*Exit MORTIMER ; the QUEEN, who has observed
him with displeasure, turns to PAULET as
is he about to follow his nephew.*

MARY.

Hold, sir ; one word more.

If you have aught to impart to me, from you
I will bear much—your age hath privileges ;
But I will not endure the insolence
Of that unmanner'd youth ; henceforth,
Spare me the needless insult of his presence.

PAULET.

Even for that honest bluntness which offends you,
I prize my nephew, madam. His is not
A heart to melt in wily woman's tears ;
Spite of his foreign sojourning in Paris

And Rheims, he's still an honest Englishman,
And all your arts are merely wasted on him.

[*Exit* PAULET.]

KENNEDY.

This to your face—this insolent coarseness!
It is too much.

MARY.

Oh no, it is mere justice.
Oft in the days of my prosperity
I lent to flatterers a willing ear;
Shall I not bear the harsh voice of reproof,
That never speaks save to adversity?

KENNEDY.

Dear lady, wherefore thus cast down and spiritless?
Time was when you would cheer and comfort me,
And I was wont to chide your too much confidence.

MARY.

I know him well; King Darnley's bloody ghost
Threat'ningly rises from his grave before me,
And he will never be at peace with me
Until my cup of misery is full.

KENNEDY.

What thoughts are these?

MARY.

Thou hast forgotten, Hannah ;
My memory keeps truer reckoning.
This is that anniversary of horror
Which still I greet with fasting and with penance.

KENNEDY.

Oh, let the evil spirit rest at last !
With years of sorrow and of adverse fortune
Have you atoned the deed : the Church that holds
The keys of loosing and of binding—yea,
And Heaven itself—has pardon'd you long since.

MARY.

Bleeding afresh, the long-forgiven guilt
Throws the light covering from its shallow grave,
And crying for revenge, my husband's ghost
Comes forth ; nor to his everlasting bed
Shall ever sound of consecrated bell
Or sight of the host-bearing priest dismiss him.

KENNEDY.

Not yours the deed ; you did not murder him.

MARY.

I knew of it ; I suffer'd it ; and smiling,
Beckon'd him to the death-snare.

KENNEDY.

Your weak youth
Pleads some excuse for you.

MARY.

Yea, youth too weak
To bear the load of guilt I laid upon it.

KENNEDY.

By bitterest injuries were you provoked,
And by your husband's haughty tyranny.
He whom from out his own dim destiny
Your love had lifted as with power divine,
Exalting him, your bridegroom, to your throne,
With all your loveliness endowing him,
And the great ancient glories of your crown—
How could he e'er forget that his high fortune
Was but the gift of all-bestowing love?
And yet he did forget it, thrice unworthy.
With base suspicions he dishonour'd you,
With coarse unmannerly roughness he offended
Your gentleness, and lost favour in your sight.
The charm dissolved that had deceived your eyes,
You fled his rude embraces, and repaid him
Disdain and scorn, his due reward. And he,
Sought he your love again? to soft relenting
Strove he to woo you, kneeling at your feet
With fond humility and fairer promise?

Not he ; bidding defiance to your power,
He sought to lord it o'er you—he, your creature.
Before your very eyes, by his command,
Was the fair gentle Rizzio stabb'd to death.
Ah, you but paid with blood that bloodiest deed.

MARY.

And bloody vengeance will come on me for it !
Thou seek'st to comfort me, and speak'st my doom.

KENNEDY.

Because thou hinderedst not, thou didst it not.
Passion's blind frenzy had laid hold of thee,
And bound to the yoke of the seducer Bothwell.
Ah, not alone the villain ruled thy bosom
With man's supremacy of power and will ;
But with foul spells, and charms, and hellish potions.
All evil arts—

MARY.

His evil arts were none
But his determined purpose and my weakness.

KENNEDY.

Not so ; I say all fiends were leagued with him,
Ere he had cast his devilish glamour o'er thee ;
Seal'd were thine eyes and ears to every warning ;
And woman's shield of fear thou hadst cast away :
Thy cheeks, the home of blushing modesty,

Glow'd with th' unholy flame of wild desire;
The veil of secrecy thou didst tear off,
And his insolent triumph trampled on thy shame.
With stony brow thou gav'st to the world's eye
Thy passion, to the murderer's bloody hand
Trusting the sword of Scotland, which he bore,
Amid the curses of the common folk,
Through Edinburgh streets proudly before thee.
Beset with weapons was the Parliament house;
And in the very temple of high justice
A bold and bitter mockery of judgment,
Wrung by thy will, proclaim'd th' assassin guiltless.
Yet further didst thou dare—Heavens !

MARY.

Speak it out ;

Before God's altar I became his wife.

KENNEDY.

Oh, let an everlasting silence cover
That desperate deed, shameful and terrible,
Worthy alone of an utter castaway !
Yet, oh, thou art not such—thou art not such.
I know thee ; yea, e'en from thy childhood upwards
Have I been near thee. Gentle is thy heart ;
Thy nature owns the sway of modesty ;
Too light a mind is all thy heaviest guilt.
Yet once again I say it—evil spirits

There be, that in th' unguarded breast of man
In fatal hours suddenly make their home.
Terror begins in us their hideous work ;
And flying back to hell, they leave behind
Desperate madness in the tainted bosom.
Since that black deed that darken'd all thy days,
Of nothing blameworthy hast thou been guilty.
I can bear witness to thy life's straight course.
Take courage, then, and with thyself make peace.
Nor was the sin thou mourn'st committed here.
Neither Elizabeth nor her English Parliament
Can be thy judges. Violence alone
Here bows thee down ; and before their tribunal
With the firm trust of innocence may'st thou stand.

MARY.

Who comes ?

[MORTIMER *appears at the door.*

KENNEDY.

'Tis Paulet's nephew ; hence, sir ! hence !

MORTIMER (*entering cautiously, to KENNEDY*).

Withdraw and watch. I must speak with the queen.

MARY (*with anxiety*).

Hannah, remain here.

MORTIMER (*giving her a letter*).

Read this paper, madam,
And know me better.

MARY.

Heavens ! what is this ?

MORTIMER.

Good Mistress Kennedy, watch, lest my uncle come.

MARY (*to KENNEDY, who looks doubtfully towards the QUEEN*).

Go—go ; do what he bids thee (*reading the letter*).

From my uncle,
The Cardinal of Lorraine ! from France—from France !
' Trust in the bearer of this paper ; in England
You have no truer friend.' Is it possible ?
Am I not cheated by some vain delusion ?
A friend so near at hand ! Now, whilst I lay
Forsaken as I thought by the whole world,
You—you—the kinsman of my prison-keeper—
You, whom I thought my bitterest enemy—

MORTIMER (*throwing himself at her feet*).

O queen, forgive the hateful impious mask,
Which to have worn thus long I scarce endured.
Yet I should bless it ; to your feet it brings me,
There to swear loyalty, help, and deliverance !

MARY.

Rise ; you amaze me, sir ! Not suddenly thus
Can I from deepest misery spring to hope.
Speak, sir, and make such joy seem possible.

MORTIMER.

Time flies; my uncle presently will be here;
And with him comes the hated Burleigh hither.
Ere with his dreadful message he surprises you,
Listen how Heaven sends deliverance to you

MARY.

A miracle of its mercy hath it wrought.

MORTIMER.

Forgive if with myself my tale begins.

MARY.

Speak, sir.

MORTIMER.

My twentieth year I number'd, madam,
Having been train'd in straightest paths of duty,
And nourish'd in the deepest hate of Rome,
When an unconquerable wild desire
Drove me to wander on the Continent.
The dreary Puritan house of pray'r, and home,
I left behind me, and with rapid steps
Passing through France, I sought with eager longing
The beautiful Italian land. It was
The Season of the Church's holiest feast;
The sunny roads swarm'd with a host of pilgrims;
Each sacred image wore a crown of flowers,
And all the tribes of the earth seem'd bound to Heaven.

The stream of joyful worship swept me on,
And bore me on its waves even into Rome.
O queen ! how fared it with me when amazed
I saw arise before me all the pomp
Of lordly pillar and triumphal arch ?
The ruin'd splendour of the Coliseum
Began the spell which soon a nobler shrine,
In its bright world of wonders, fasten'd on me.
Ne'er had I felt the power of art and beauty ;
The Church that claim'd me hates the soft enchantment
That binds the senses ;—image will it none,
And honours nothing but the bodiless Word.
What then became I, as within the temple
I trode, and heard the strains that come from heaven,
And all the lovely witchery of form
From wall and dome sprang into life before me ?
All highest and all holiest influences,
Touch'd by the ravish'd senses, stirr'd within me,
And holiest Faith visibly stood before me,
When I beheld the angel's heavenly greeting,
The Saviour's birth, the lovely Virgin Mother,
Th' ascended Trinity, and bright Transfiguration ;
When in his splendour I beheld the pope
Filling his holy office, and the people blessing—
What 's the pale glimmering of gold or jewels
Wherewith the kings of the earth adorn themselves ?
He only with unearthly splendour shines,
And heaven's kingdom may his house be call'd,
For not of this world is its glorious beauty.

MARY.

Oh, spare me !—say no more !—forbear to spread
Life's fresh and glowing pictures thus before me—
A miserable prisoner !

MORTIMER.

Such was I, madam ;

And, lo ! my prison doors sprang open — free
Suddenly stood my soul, greeting life's light.
Hatred I swore to my old narrow creed,
With a fresh garland bound my youthful brows,
And full of joy join'd those who did rejoice.
With many noble Scotchmen I consorted,
And lively gallants from the land of France ;
They drew me to the dwelling of your uncle,
The Cardinal of Guise. Oh, what a man !
Of what a steadfast and a sovereign soul !
How truly born a governor of spirits !
The express model of a royal priest !
A prince of the Church—none other like to him.

MARY.

What ! you have seen the noble countenance
Of that revered, that best-beloved man—
The godly guide of my inexperienced youth ?
O tell me, does he yet remember me ?
How thrive his stately fortunes ? Is he still
The pride, the prop, the pillar of our Church ?

MORTIMER.

With excellent humility he stoop'd
To be himself my teacher in the faith,
And scatter all the doubtings of my spirit.
He show'd me how man's grovelling reason still
Led him to error only; that the eye must see
What the heart must believe; that the Church needed
One head infallible; and that the Spirit of truth
Rested upon the councils of the Fathers.
How quail'd before his conquering intellect
And the persuasion of his eloquent lips,
The puny forces of my childish faith!
Back to the Church's bosom I return'd,
And in his hands abjured my heresy.

MARY.

So you are one among the many thousands
That he, like the heavenly Preacher of the mountain,
Hath seized with his sacred might of eloquence
And guided to salvation everlasting.

MORTIMER.

Soon after this, summon'd to France, he sent me
To Rheims, where the holy company of Jesus
Piously labour'd, training English priests.
Here did I find that noble Scotchman, Morgan,
And your faithful Lesley, the learn'd bishop of Ross,
Dragging their joyless days of banishment

Out on the soil of France. To these most worthy
I straitly bound myself, and in their fellowship
Strengthen'd my faith. One day it chanced
That in the bishop's dwelling I beheld
The picture of a woman, whose fair image
Made fast my eyes and heart with strange emotion.
My inmost soul was touch'd with the mighty spell,
And powerless o'er myself I stood and gazed.
'Well may you gaze in wonder and in pity,'
Spake the good bishop, 'on that gracious face ;
The fairest of all women in the world
Is of all earthly women the most miserable ;
A prisoner for our holy Church's sake
Languishes in your land this hapless lady.'

MARY.

Oh, faithful heart ! No, I have not lost all
While my ill fortune leaves me such a friend.

MORTIMER.

With words that thrill'd my heart then did he paint
Your dreary martyrdom and your foes' bloody hate.
Your royal lineage he laid before me,
And your descent from the high house of Tudor ;
Convinced me you alone should reign in England,
And not this after-thought of queen—brought forth
From an adulterous bed—by her own father
Henry cast off for cause of bastardy.
Nor did I trust alone his warrant for it ;

I sought the counsel of law-learned men ;
I studied nought but genealogies,
And every source of knowledge that I tried
Witness'd the strength of your most rightful claim.
In England are you guilty but of this—
That the land wherein you lie a prisoner
Is your inheritance, your lawful kingdom.

MARY.

Thrice fatal right ! sole source of all my wrongs !

MORTIMER.

Now came the rumour that you were removed
From Talbot's castle to my uncle's guard.
The wonder-working hand of Heaven I saw
In this event, and the loud call of fate
To me whose arm was chosen to set you free.
My friends approved my hopes, the Cardinal
Confirm'd them with his counsel and his blessing,
And tutor'd me in the heavy task of feigning.
Quickly the plan was woven, and I turn'd
Homewards to mine own land, where I set foot
Ten days ago, and stood in your royal presence.
You I beheld—no more a painted image.
Oh ! what a treasure-casket is this castle ;
No prison, but a shrine of precious beauty,
More full of splendour than the English court.
Yea, and thrice happy they who may but breathe
Within these walls the air that you inhale.

Oh, wisely doth Elizabeth here cage you,
Shut from all eyes ; she knows that if but once
Your gracious loveliness shone on the land,
England would rise up as one man t' acknowledge you.

MARY.

Oh, well for me had England but your eyes !

MORTIMER.

The world would have them could it but behold you,
As I have done, in your unworthy durance.
With what a royal courage, saintly humbleness,
You hourly suffer wrong and contumely,
A queen amid all griefs and injuries.
Nor can this prison dim your beauty's lustre ;
Each ornament of life is wanting here,
But your mere presence makes a light and splendour.
Oh, never does my foot approach this threshold
That my heart thrills not with delight and sorrow,
Beholding you. But the end draws near apace ;
With every hour the danger presses close.
I dare no longer pause—no longer from you
Hide the stern fate that threatens you.

MARY.

They've sentenced me ?
Speak without fear—I shall not fear to hear it.

MORTIMER.

The two and forty judges have condemn'd you ;
The Lords and Commons, and the city of London,
Vehemently demand the sentence be fulfill'd.
Elizabeth still wavers, and makes show
Of greater mercy than her counsellors,
And therein shows false cunning, not true mercy —
Making it seem that they compel her will.

MARY (*with composure*).

Sir, you have spoken nothing to amaze
Or fright me ; even for such an embassy
I have been long prepared. I know my judges,
And I can well believe that, after all
I have endured, they dare not set me free.
I know how far they 'll venture ; in some dungeon
All the remainder of my life must waste,
And my revenge and right be buried there.

MORTIMER.

No, no ! believe it not : not so will it end,
Nor tyranny leave its damn'd work half done.
Long as you live, Elizabeth's fear lives too ;
No dungeon buries deep enough your claim :
Her throne stands safely only on your grave.

MARY.

What ! shall the headsman's bloody gripe be laid
Upon the head of a thrice-anointed queen ?
She dares not do it.

MORTIMER.

She dares—she dares—she will.

MARY.

Will she thus trample in the mire of infamy
All Christian sovereignty—her own withal ?
And fears she nothing the revenge of France ?

MORTIMER.

She makes with France fair league and amity,
And gives the Duke of Anjou her hand and crown.

MARY.

Will not the King of Spain take arms against her ?

MORTIMER.

She fears no foreign arms while she keeps peace
At home with her subjects.

MARY.

And to those subjects
Will she dare give this hideous spectacle ?

MORTIMER.

This land has seen, madam, of late too many
Women of royal state come down from the throne

And mount the scaffold : up those bloody steps
Elizabeth's mother climb'd—and Katharine Howard
And fair young Lady Grey had worn the crown.

MARY (*after a pause*).

No, Mortimer—never believe it—never.
The care of your faithful heart blinds you for me,
And conjures a vain terror to appal you.
'Tis not the scaffold, sir, that I need fear ;
There be yet other means more safe and secret
Through which the Queen of England may avoid
My claim : before she finds an executioner
It will be easier to find a murderer.
This is the fear that shakes me ; and no cup
Touches my lips but, shuddering, I bethink me
It may contain a draught of my sister's love.

MORTIMER.

Oh, fear it not ; nor open nor conceal'd
Shall murder to your precious life draw near.
All is prepared : twelve noble English youths,
Bound by one compact all, this very day
Have sworn upon the holy sacrament
With the strong arm of right to set you free.
Count d'Aubespine, the French ambassador,
Knows of our oath, and join'd his hand to ours ;
And in his palace is our place of meeting.

MARY.

Ah, through my heart you send a thrill of terror,
Not joy — a horrible forewarning of dismay.
What is 't ye undertake? Do ye well know?
Do not the bloody heads of Babington
And Tischbourne, rear'd on London Bridge, affright ye?
Even in such attempts they found their fate,
And only made my chains the heavier.
Generous, and brave, and young, why should ye perish?
Hence, and forget you ever have beheld me.
Already 'mong your ranks Burleigh perchance
Has sown his spies. Leave me, and live; for I
Have had no friend that e'er was fortunate.

MORTIMER.

The bloody heads, set for a grisly warning
On London Bridge, nothing affright my soul;
Nor the disastrous fate of those unnumber'd
Who found their death in the same enterprise:
They found therein an everlasting glory;
And blest are they who die to set you free.

MARY.

Nor force nor cunning can avail to save me.
Powerful and watchful are mine enemies;
And at my prison door not Paulet only,
And his guard keep ward over me—all England

Stands sentinel at these gates : Elizabeth
Of her free will alone can open them.

MORTIMER.

Then hope it never.

MARY.

One man alone might do it.

MORTIMER.

Oh, let me know his name.

MARY.

The Earl of Leicester.

MORTIMER.

Your bloodiest enemy, Elizabeth's darling.

MARY.

If I can yet be saved, 't is he can save me.
Go to him—haste—speak freely with him, Mortimer ;
And for a witness that you come from me,
Bear him this letter—it contains my picture.

[*She takes a paper from her bosom.* MORTIMER
starts back, and hesitates to receive it.

Nay, take it. I have carried it conceal'd
About my person, for your uncle's watchfulness
Left me no way to reach him ; you are come,
Sent by my guardian angel, to my succour.

MORTIMER.

Oh, madam, deign t' unravel this strange mystery.

MARY.

The Earl of Leicester will unwind it to you.

Trust him; he will trust you—Who comes?

[*Enter* KENNEDY.

KENNEDY.

Sir Amias Paulet, with a lord from court.

MORTIMER.

'Tis Burleigh: call your courage to you, madam,

And with indifferency hear his tidings.

[*Exeunt* MORTIMER and KENNEDY;

enter BURLEIGH and PAULET.

PAULET.

Madam, to-day you wish'd for certain knowledge
Of your fate; Lord Burleigh comes to bring it to you;
With steadfastness receive it.

MARY.

Worthily

I hope, as it becomes the innocent.

BURLEIGH.

Commission'd by the council—

MARY.

My Lord Burleigh

Readily lends his tongue to the tribunal
To which he hath already given his spirit.

PAULET.

You speak as though you already knew the sentence.

MARY.

Since my Lord Burleigh brings it, I do know it.
To the business, sir.

BURLEIGH.

Madam, having referr'd yourself
To the judgment of the two and forty peers—

MARY.

Pardon, my lord, that at the very outset
I must arrest your words. I have accepted,
Say you, the judgment of the English peers.
That have I never done!—never; my rank,
The honour of my people, and my son,
And of all sovereigns, could I so deny.
Your laws compel not me—but if they did,
Your meanest citizen, by those laws protected,
Is tried by his peers. Have you a jury of kings
To try me by?—my peers are kings, my lord.

BURLEIGH.

You heard the accusations brought against you,
And therein did acknowledge the tribunal.

MARY.

Through Hatton's cunning craft was I induced,
For my honour's sake, and in unshaken faith
Of the triumphant victory of my cause,
To lend an ear to those same articles,
And the grounds whereon they rested: due respect
I meant to show your lords, but never meant
To accept their right to pass judgment on me.

BURLEIGH.

Whether you admit it, madam, or deny it,
Is a mere form without significance,
Which will in nowise bar the course of judgment.
You breathe the air of England, and enjoy
Her law's protection, and must needs obey
Its power.

MARY.

I breathe the air of an English prison.
Call you that living 'neath the law's protection?
Nothing I know, and nothing seek to know,
Of your law's protection. I am not England's subject,
But the free-born sovereign of a foreign land.

BURLEIGH.

And think you that the title of a sovereign
Can give the right to sow bloody divisions
In the bosom of the land unpunished?
How stood it with the safety of all nations,
If the sword of justice might not aim its stroke,
At a royal guest, as at the meanest beggar?

MARY.

I fear and I refuse no reckoning:
The judges only—I will not accept.

BURLEIGH.

The judges — nay, but, madam — are they then
Drawn from the common herd — a sort of rabble?
Shameless tongue-waggers — to whom truth and right
Are things so vile, that they would bow themselves
Readily to a judgment preordained them?
Are they not rather the first men of the land —
Powerful enough to dare be true, and high enough
To look beyond prince-fear, and all base custom?
Be they not e'en the men who rule this nation
Of free and noble people, — whose mere names
Are warrant against every doubtful thing?
At their head stands the shepherd of the Church,
The holy Primate, Archbishop of Canterbury;
The excellent Talbot, Keeper of the Seals;
And Howard, Admiral of our kingdom's navies.

Say, could the sovereign of this realm do more
Than choose the best and noblest of the realm
To make them judges of this royal question?
Is it to be believed that party hate
Smirches such souls as these? — and can it be thought
That forty chosen gentlemen should join
To give a passionate perjury for their verdict?

MARY.

Wondering I listen to that eloquent tongue,
That still has been so adverse to my fortunes.
How shall an unlearn'd woman like myself
Answer the master of such potent speech?
So, were your judges such, sir, as you say,
I needs must give my cause for lost, it seems,
And call myself guilty, because they condemn me.
And yet these names, by you deem'd of such virtue,
Whose weight of worth must crush me to the dust,
In the records of your country, sir, I see
Filling far other and less noble parts.
I see this high nobility of England —
The kingdom's lordly senate — e'en as slaves
Of a seraglio's sultan, bow to the will
Of my despotic uncle, Henry the Eighth.
I see this immaculate House of Lords, as vile
As the base rabble of the venal commons,
Make and unmake their edicts; bind and loose
The tie of marriage at their king's command;

To-day the daughters of the royal blood
Thrusting aside, with shameful brand of bastardy,
And to-morrow calling them to wear the crown ;
And four times, under four successive sov'reigns,
Suffering conversion, for pure conscience' sake.

BURLEIGH.

You call'd yourself a stranger to our laws.
You are well versed in our evil fortunes, madam.

MARY.

And these shall be my judges ! my Lord High Treasurer.
I will deal uprightly with you, so deal
With me. 'T is said you love and serve your country
And queen with true unwearied fealty ;
I well believe it. Not self-seeking policy
Sways you, but the high interest of the realm
And its sovereign. Even for that very reason
Should you mistrust yourself, my lord, lest that
Should seem to you justice and right, which is
Indeed no more than a shrewd state policy.
I nothing doubt it, by your side there sit
Among my judges worthy noblemen ;
But they are Protestants, and jealous too
For England's weal. Can such men speak true judgment
On me, the Roman Catholic queen of Scotland ?
No Englishman deals fairly with a Scot :

'T is an old saying, and so true an one,
That never before any seat of justice
May Scot or Briton witness 'gainst each other:
Experience made this into law, my lord;
And in old custom lives authority,
So that it should be honour'd. On these islands,
As on a narrow plank floating at sea,
Nature together cast unkindred folk;
Sharing it too unequally between us,
And leaving us to fight out the division:
The narrow Tweed, like a thread, alone divides
The fiery nations, and with mingled blood
Of neighbour foes oft are its waters thick.
For a thousand years on either bank have stood,
Threatening and sword in hand, the adverse races;
No enemy strikes at the peace of England
Who has not for his swift ally the Scot,
No civil war bursts into flame in Scotland
That is not fired or fann'd by an English hand,
And never will this deadly hatred die
Till in one Parliament, the lawgivers,
And under one sceptre, the two peoples, meet.

BURLEIGH.

And such a happiness the Stuart's sway
Had given to England?

MARY.

Why should I deny it?

Yea, I had hope under the olive's shade
Some day to join two free and noble nations,
Nor thought in evil hour myself to be
The victim of their mutual enmity.
The ancient jealousy and envious grudge
I dreamt I happily might quench for ever,
And as my grandsire, Richmond, twined together
The rival roses, the two rival crowns
Of England and of Scotland, I might join.

BURLEIGH.

By an ill way have you walked to reach that goal,
Who have set the land on fire, and sought to climb
Through the flames of civil strife, the steps of the
throne.

MARY.

Never, by the great God in heaven, never!
When did I so? where is your proof of it?

BURLEIGH.

I came not here to wrangle, madam; nor is
The case a matter more for idle words.
Of two and forty voices, all but two
Have spoken you guilty, in that you have broken
The statute and decree but last year framed,

By which it is enacted thus :—‘ Whenever
Seditious tumult shall be stirr’d in the land,
In the name and behoof of any individual,
The Crown shall exercise its lawful right
Of trial and of prosecution,
Even to the death of any so proved guilty.’
And since it now appears—

MARY.

My Lord of Burleigh,

I nothing doubt that a decree expressly
Made to condemn me, will be used to do it.
Woe to the victim when one selfsame tongue
Ordains the law, accuses, and condemns !
Can you deny it, sir, that this new statute
Was for my special overthrow devised ?

BURLEIGH.

Madam, it might have been your special warning ;
You have yourself converted it to a snare.
You saw the abyss yawning before your feet,
And warn’d to shun it, cast yourself therein.
You held intelligence with Babington,
The traitor, and his fellow-murderers,
Of all their movements you were cognisant,
And from your prison guided their conspiracy.

MARY.

When did I thus ? where are the proofs, my lord ?

BURLEIGH.

The proofs were lately laid before the court.

MARY.

Copies of documents by unknown hands:
It must be proved that I dictated them,
That they were dictated in those same words
By me—in the very words read to the court.

BURLEIGH.

They are the same received by Babington,
For he confess'd to them before his death.

MARY.

And why was he not living set before me?
Why was he hustled from the world so fast,
Ere face to face he had been brought with me?

BURLEIGH.

Your secretaries Kurl and Nau depose,
Upon their oath, the words to be the same
Which from your own lips they wrote down.

MARY.

So then,

On my own servants' witness I am sentenced,
Upon the faith and truth of those who swearing,
Betrayed their faith and truth already sworn
To me, their queen and mistress, once before.

BURLEIGH.

Madam, yourself declared the Scotchman Kurl
Upright and faithful, yea, an honest man.

MARY.

And so I might ; yet as no man's virtue's proved
Till it hath pass'd the hour of its temptation,
Torture may have affrighted or constrain'd him
To utter he might hardly well know what.
Perchance he thought to save his own poor life,
And not much injure me, by his false witness.

BURLEIGH.

On his free oath he gave his testimony.

MARY.

But never in my presence. How, my lord,
Two witnesses yet live who swear against me!
Let them be set before my face, and let them
Repeat before me what they witness of me.
Will you deny me what a murderer claims?
From Talbot, my late keeper, did I learn
That in this very reign it was enacted
That face to face th' accuser and th' accused
Should stand confronted—but I have been deceived:
Sir Amias Paulet, I believe you honest,
Prove yourself so, and answer me, on your conscience,
Is not this, as I say, the law of England?

PAULET.

Madam, it is ; so rules the right with us ;
And what is truth I may not disavow.

MARY.

Now, my Lord Burleigh, since with such a stress
Your law is laid upon me to condemn me—
How is it that I may not share as well
The power of your law when it protects me ?
Answer me, sir—why came not Babington
Before me, and why am I not confronted
With my two secretaries who yet live ?

BURLEIGH.

Not only your confederacy with Babington—

MARY.

Yes ; only that have I to answer for,
For that alone the sword of justice threatens me,
Keep to the point, my lord ; do n't swerve from it.

BURLEIGH.

It is well known that with the Spanish envoy,
Mendoza, you have traffick'd

MARY.

That's not the point ;
Keep to the point, sir.

BURLEIGH.

The faith of the land you seek to overturn,
And all the crowns of Europe you stir up
In war against us.

MARY.

No; I have not done so.

But were it true even as it is false,
What then? Here am I held a prisoner,
Against all holiest right of law and nations.
I came not with the sword into your land;
Fugitive, suppliant, I hither came,
Claiming the sacred rights of hospitality
Even in the arms of my kinswoman, your queen;
But violence laid hold on me, and fetters
Were all the safe keeping afforded me.
Speak, is my faith plighted to such a land?
What duty, what allegiance do I owe it?
I do but use the holiest right of nature,
When from these chains I seek to free myself;
Repelling force with force, and all the kings
Of this hemisphere calling to aid my cause.
That which in every war is lawful held,
Loyal and knightly, nothing misbecomes me.
Murder alone—the bloody secret stroke
I may not dare—conscience and pride forbid it.
Mine enemies' murder would dishonour me—
Dishonour, mark me, sir—I did not say

That even that could bow me to your sentence ;
For might, not right, has come to be the question
Between myself and England.

BURLEIGH (*significantly*).

Do not, madam,
So vehemently on your rights insist.
Stern right is seldom found the prisoner's friend.

MARY.

I am the weaker, you the stronger side ;
Use, then, your strength, so be it—murder me,
And to your safety offer up my life.
But let the deed be called not right, but might ;
Borrow not justice's holy sword to stab
The enemy you hate and fear ; nor wrap
In garments sanctified your bloody violence.
With no such jugglery is the world cheated,
For you can murder, but you cannot judge me.
Cease, then, to strive the fruits of treachery,
And the fair show of justice, to combine,
And what you dare to be—dare to appear.
[Exit MARY.]

BURLEIGH.

She scorns us, Paulet, and at the scaffold's foot
Will still defy us. That imperious spirit
Cannot be broken ; even her sentence brought not
Perturbation to her soul ; with tearless eyes

And unchanged colour did she hear her doom.
She craves no pity from us. Well she knows
The uncertain humour of our English queen,
And that which is our fear, lends her this daring.

PAULET.

My Lord High Treasurer, this idle confidence
Will vanish with the vain pretext that feeds it.
But in this trial—if I dare say so—matters
Have been in an unseemly fashion dealt with.
Into her presence Babington and Tischbourne
Should have been brought ; and now her secretaries
Should be confronted with her.

BURLEIGH.

Never—never !

It were not to be ventured ! Far too strong
Is the spell with which she sways the souls of men,
And the mighty witchery of her woman's tears.
If Kurl her secretary stood before her
He would deny himself—call back his witness.

PAULET.

So shall the enemies of England fill
The world with shameful outcries on her justice ;
And all the solemn pomp of this trial show
But as an insolent outrage on the right.

BURLEIGH.

That is the very care that chafes our queen ;
O that this evil genius of our land
Had died or ever she set foot in it !

PAULET.

Amen, I say to that !

BURLEIGH.

Once deadly sickness
Seized on her in her prison.

PAULET.

Verily

Her sickness would have been the health of England.

BURLEIGH.

Yet, had she hence by natural accident
Been snatched—we surely had been held her murderers.

PAULET.

What then ? men must have leave to think their
thoughts.

BURLEIGH.

Yet were it well—and not so loud a rumour
Would it stir—

PAULET.

What matters it how loud ?
Not loud but rightful blame alone can harm us.

BURLEIGH.

Yet highest right sometimes escapes not censure ;
Opinion still leans towards th' unfortunate,
And envy follows only those who triumph.
The sword of justice that becomes a man,
Seems horrible in a woman's hand ; the world
Believes not in the justice of one woman
Of which another is the sacrifice.
Vainly we judges have pronounc'd the sentence ;
With the queen remains the royal right of mercy,
And she must use it—'t would not be endured
That she should bid the sentence be fulfilled.

PAULET.

And so —

BURLEIGH.

And so this woman lives ; no, never !
Even this it is that weighs upon the queen,
Scaring her sleep away ; in her eyes I read
Her spirits' ceaseless strife ; nor dare she utter
The wish that speaks in her careworn troubled looks :
'Will none of all my servants save me from
The bitter choice—for ever on my throne
To quake with fear, or, with a ruthless hand,
To thrust a queen and my near kinswoman
Under the headsman's axe ?'

PAULET.

'T is even thus ;
Of hard necessity, thus must it be !

BURLEIGH.

And yet the queen might deem it need not be,
If she had faithful and observant servants.

PAULET.

Observant !

BURLEIGH.

Yea, such as could understand
The silent meaning of a mute command.

PAULET.

A mute command ?

BURLEIGH.

Who, trusted with the keeping
Of a venomous viper, guarded the deadly thing
Not as a holy and a precious treasure.

PAULET (*emphatically*).

And such a treasure is the unspotted name
And unsuspected faith of our queen and mistress ;
No man can guard it, sir, too sacredly.

BURLEIGH.

When from the keeping of the Earl of Shrewsbury
This wily prisoner to yours was given,
Paulet, 't was thought—

PAULET.

'T was thought, my lord, no doubt,
That truest hands should hold the heaviest trust;
By Heav'n! ne'er had I consented to receive
The unwelcome office, but that I thought it needed
As good a man as England could afford!
Let me not think I owe the hateful honour
To anything but my well-known honesty.

BURLEIGH.

Say it were rumour'd that her health is failing,
And day by day she sicken'd, and so sank
Out of the voice and memory of men,—
Your hands are clean.

PAULET.

But not my conscience, too!

BURLEIGH.

Enough! since your conscience is too squeamish, sir,
At least you'll offer no impediment—

PAULET (*interrupting him*).

No murderer shall cross this threshold—no!
As long as my household gods protect her head,

Her life is sacred to me ; not more sacred
Is the dear life of the queen of England to me.
You are her judge—judge her, and sentence her ;
And when the hour is come, send hither, and build
The scaffold—to the sheriff and the headsman
My gates shall be unbarr'd ; but until then,
She 's trusted to my care, and I 'll so keep her
That she shall neither do, nor suffer harm.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE 1.

*The Palace in Westminster. Enter the EARL OF KENT and
SIR WILLIAM DAVISON, meeting.*

DAVISON.

Is 't you, my Lord of Kent, from the tournament
So soon return'd? Is all the bravery over?

KENT.

How, were you not at the jousting?

DAVISON.

That might not
The duties of mine office well allow.

KENT.

Then you have lost the finest spectacle
That ever taste devised or wit conducted.
There was display'd how the fortress of Chaste Beauty
Is by Desire besieged; the Lord High Marshal
And the Chief Justice, the Seneschal, and ten
Of the queen's knights, defended the fair fortress;
And the French cavaliers attacked its walls.
First there appeared a herald, who did demand,
In a choice madrigal, the tower's surrender;
And from the wall the Chancellor replied;
Thereon th' artillery play'd, and flowery wreaths

And costly perfumed essences were fired
From the dainty mimic ordnance—but in vain ;
The storm was driven back—Desire retreated.

DAVISON.

A sign of evil omen sure, my lord,
For the French marriage suit ; is it not ?

KENT.

Nay, this was but a jest. I think in earnest
That the fair fortress will surrender.

DAVISON.

Do you ?

So do not I, my lord.

KENT.

Why, the hardest
Articles of the treaty France agrees to :
Monsieur will in a private chapel hold
His own religious ceremonies, and openly
The faith of the land swear to preserve and honour.
Had you beheld the people's joy when these
Good news were spread abroad ! for this has been
The constant dread of all the land—that the queen
Should without issue die, and so the realm
Papist become again, if to the throne
The Stuart should succeed.

DAVISON.

That fear is needless ;
One to a bridal chamber is bound, the other
To her grave.

KENT.

The queen !

*Enter ELIZABETH, ushered by LEICESTER, followed by COUNT
D'AUBESPINE, BELLIEVRE, SHREWSBURY, BURLEIGH, and other
French and English lords.*

ELIZABETH (*to AUBESPINE*).

Count d'Aubespine, I pity
These noble gentlemen, whose gallant zeal
Hath led them hither o'er the sea ; full sorely
Must they miss here the glories of St. Germain's ;
My poor court ill can furnish feasts of the gods
Such as the royal Mother of France commands.
A glad and a good people, who whene'er
I come abroad among them throng around
My litter with their blessings—this is all
The lordly show, that with some pride I give
To foreign eyes. The noble maiden loveliness
That blooms round Katharine like a flower garden
Throws into shade me, and my homely merits.

AUBESPINE.

The court of Westminster shows but one lady
To the amazed stranger ; but in that one
Every enchanting charm of her sex is gather'd.

ELIZABETH.

Slaves of their state are kings!

And never may they take their heart for guide.

It was my dearest wish to die unmarried—

Therein, indeed, had I set my chiefest glory—

That graven on my tomb it should be read :

‘ Here sleeps the Virgin Queen ;’ but so my subjects

Will not have it. Already they devise

For the time when I shall be no more ; the present,

With all its blessings, cannot satisfy them,

And to their future weal I must give up

Myself, and what I prize my highest good—

My maiden freedom ; so will my people have it ;

And so they put a master over me.

Well do they prove they hold me but a woman !

And yet I thought I had ruled them manfully—

Yea, like a king. Well wot I that they serve

Not God the best who spurn the law of nature ;

And those did well who filled this seat before me,

Who opened wide the cloister doors, and sent

Back to the holiest duties of their kind

Thousands of superstition’s pining victims ;—

But a queen, whose days never in idle pomp

Were wasted, who unweariedly fulfils

The heaviest of all labours, she, methinks,

From nature’s common yoke might be exempt.

One half of the human species holds the other

Subject.

AUBESPINE.

Each several virtue, royal lady,
Have you honour'd on your throne; yet none is greater
Than that you show the sex whose pride you are,
The shining pattern of their especial glory.
Well I believe there lives no man on earth
Worthy thy freedom's costly sacrifice;
And yet if royal blood, and noble virtue,
And manly comeliness, may mortal man
Make worthy of that honour, then—

ELIZABETH.

No doubt,

My lord ambassador, that an alliance
With France's royal son would honour me;
Moreover, I will openly confess,
If it must be—if I can do no other
But yield to my people's importunity
(And much I fear 't will stronger prove than I),
Then, in all Europe know I of no prince
To whom with less unwillingness I could
Surrender the fair jewel of my freedom.
Let this confession satisfy you, sir.

BELLIEVRE.

Fairest of hopes—it is but hope; my master
Would fain crave more.

ELIZABETH (*draws a ring from her finger and looks at it thoughtfully*).

What more? Shall a queen have
No greater privilege than a citizen's wife,
Exchanging equal signs of equal troth-plight
And equal bonds? Marriage is made with rings,
And chains are made of rings too; bear this token
To his highness; it is yet no chain, nor binds me;
But it may be a link of one that will.

BELLIEVRE (*kneeling to receive the ring*).

In his name, mighty queen, kneeling, I take
This token, and the kiss of humblest homage,
Lay on my lady's hand.

ELIZABETH (*to Leicester, whom she has been observing during the foregoing dialogue*).

With leave, Lord Leicester.

[*She takes the order of the George from him, and hangs it round BELLIEVRE'S neck.*]

Invest his highness with this knightly badge,
And bid him swear the Order's oath to me:
'Honi soit qui mal y pense!' for ever vanish
Mistrust between our nations, and a bond
Of closest confidence henceforth combine
The crowns of England and of France!

AUBESPINE.

Great queen, this is a day of joy — so be it
Fully and perfectly! and may to-day

No tears be shed throughout this land ! Mercy
Shines in thy countenance ; oh, let the rays
Of its blessed light fall on a wretched princess,
Who, near allied alike to France and England—

ELIZABETH.

No further, count — let us not mix together
Two wholly separate matters. If indeed
France holds our union dear, then must she needs
Embrace my cause, nor be my enemy's friend.

AUBESPINE.

France were unworthy in your own eyes, madam,
If she forgot, in the hour of this alliance,
The hapless widow of her king — the daughter
Of her own faith. Humanity and honour
Alike demand—

ELIZABETH.

Sir, I accept your words
As a decorous, seemly intercession ;
France doth discharge the duty of a friend,
That of a queen must be to me conceded.

*[She bows to the French lords, who, with their
suite and all but the following persons, re-
spectfully withdraw. Manent ELIZABETH,
LEICESTER, BURLEIGH, TALBOT. The Queen
seats herself.]*

BURLEIGH.

Illustrious sovereign ! you to-day have crown'd
The dearest wishes of your faithful people !
Now, for the first time, may we well rejoice,
And feel the blessings of the fortunate days
You give to us, now that no more with trembling
We look towards a tempest-brooding future.
One only care now weighs upon the land,
One victim that all voices clamour for.
Grant you but this, and ground from this day forth
On an assured foundation England's weal.

ELIZABETH.

What will my people further ? — speak, my lord.

BURLEIGH.

They ask the head of Mary Stuart : if
You to your people would most surely give
The precious gift of freedom, and the light
Of dear-won truth — she must no longer live.
If for your sacred life we must not quake
With daily fears, your enemy must fall.
Well do you know your subjects do not own
One common creed ; and Rome's idolatry
Claims many a secret votary in the land,
Who feed their hopes with thoughts of bitter hate.
On Mary Stuart hang their hearts : they are
All bound in secret to the Lorrain princess,

Irreconcilable enemies of your name.
This raging faction have against you sworn
War to extermination, with hell's weapons.
In Rheims, the seat of the Cardinal Archbishop,
They hold their arsenal and forge their bolts ;
There regicide is taught, and busily
Forth send they hither from that goodly school
Upon their mission resolute fanatics,
Shrouded in every guise: already thence
The third assassin has been hither sped ;
And unexhausted from this noisome den
The tribe of hidden foes for ever rises.
And yonder sits, in Fotheringay Castle,
The Até of this endless war, who with
The torch of love sets the whole land on fire.
For her, who flatters each with a false hope,
Youth doth devote itself to certain death.
To set her free, that is their hope—to seat her
Upon your throne, that is the aim of all.
For by the House of Lorrain your sacred right
Stands unconfess'd—to them you will for ever
Be an usurper, crown'd by chance alone ;
By them, inspired with folly, did she sign
Herself the queen of England—there's no peace
Possible between you and them : you must
Suffer or strike the blow, and to the end
Her life is death to you — her death your life.

ELIZABETH.

A heavy office have you chosen, sir.
I know the honest purpose of your zeal,
And that you utter nothing but pure wisdom ;
But the wisdom whose decree is blood-shedding
I do abhor—yea, from my inmost soul.
Bethink you of some milder counsel. Noble lord
Of Shrewsbury, let us hear your thinking.

TALBOT.

A worthy praise, madam, you have bestow'd
Upon the zeal that fires Lord Burleigh's breast ;
My heart with no less loyal duty throbs,
But the great gift to speak it is not mine.
Still may you live to be your people's joy,
And to prolong in this land the reign of peace ;
Never hath England happier days beheld
Since it hath known a lawful sovereign's sway.
May this prosperity cost no jot of honour,
Or if it must, may Talbot's eyes ne'er see it !

ELIZABETH.

Now Heaven forfend our honour should be stain'd !

TALBOT.

Bethink you, then, upon some other means
To save your kingdom, for Mary Stuart's death
Is an unrighteous means. You cannot sentence
One who is not your subject.

ELIZABETH.

My council errs then,
My parliament doth err, and each tribunal
Through the whole land that sanctions it, doth err ?

TALBOT.

Mouth honour, madam, is no proof of right ;
England is not the world, her parliament
Is not a gathering of all the nations,
This hour, to-day, is not all future time,
Neither is it the past. As you incline
The wills of others, so doth sink or rise
The unstable wave of judgment : never plead
That you obey a stern necessity
And your people's urging ; even when you will,
Yea, in that instant, may you prove and find
The freedom of your will. So prove it—show
That blood appalls you — that your sister's life
You will not sacrifice ; show unto them
Who counsel otherwise your royal wrath ;
Then will this phantom of necessity
Vanish, and what seemed right shall straight be wrong.
You are the judge alone — upon this reed
That bends beneath you 't is in vain to lean.
Faithfully follow your own milder instinct.
God sow'd not strength in woman's gentle heart ;
And they who framed our goodly government,
Trusting to woman's hands the reins of rule,

Meant not stern strength should be the virtue paramount
Of kings who reign over this English land.

ELIZABETH.

How warm an advocate is my Lord Shrewsbury
For one who is mine and my kingdom's enemy !
I choose the counsel that doth love my welfare.

TALBOT.

No advocate was granted her ; none dare
To speak in her behalf, and set himself
Against your wrath unarm'd. Mine be it then,
Who, old, and tottering on the brink of the grave,
Can feel no more the lure of earthly hopes,
Thus to defend the utterly forlorn.
Be it not said that in your kingdom's councils
Passion and selfishness may cry aloud,
And only mercy have no leave to speak.
Banded against her everything conspires ;
You never have beheld her countenance,
And nothing in your heart pleads for the stranger.
I name not now her guilt. It has been said
Her husband with her cognisance was murder'd ;
Certain it is, she wed his murderer.
A heavy crime ! and yet when it befell
The times were dark, and full of luckless deeds.
In the fierce stress of furious civil strife,

Where weak and helpless she beheld herself
With vassal violence hemm'd in and threaten'd,
She cast herself into the strongest arms,
Compell'd, who knows by what a cunning force,
For woman is a frail and fearful thing.

ELIZABETH.

Woman is not weak ! strong souls enough, I ween,
Are to be found among us. In my presence
Nothing of woman's weakness will I hear.

TALBOT.

To you misfortune was a school of strength ;
Life turn'd not upon you its smiling aspect ;
No throne beckon'd you from afar, but at your feet
A grave for ever yawn'd. In Woodstock's shades,
And in the Tower's gloom, the merciful Father
Of our dear land taught you, through sorrow's discipline,
Duty's stern lore. No flatterer sought you there.
Wrapt in itself, your spirit, undisturb'd
By the wild uproar of the world, betimes
Learn'd to reflect, and prize this life's real treasure.
No God so rescued her. A little child,
She was transported to the court of France,
That court of vanity and thoughtless pleasure,
Where in one endless revel of delight
She never heard the sober voice of truth ;
Dazzled by vicious folly's glittering pomp,

And swept away upon corruption's stream,
To her was beauty's idle crown allotted,
Blooming, she far outshone all other women,
And her fair face no less than royal birth—

ELIZABETH.

Come to yourself, my Lord of Shrewsbury !
Bethink you that we here in council sit.
Forsooth, those must be wondrous charms indeed,
That thus can set a hoary head on fire ;
Lord Leicester, you alone keep silence still,
That which lets loose his tongue, perchance binds
yours ?

LEICESTER.

Madam, amazement only keeps me silent
That terrors such as these should fill your ears ;
That the idle tales in London streets, believed
And dreaded by the credulous mob, should find
An echo in your council chamber walls,
And busy wise, grave men with foolish rumours.
Yea, I confess, I 'm seized with admiration,
To think this landless Queen of Scots, who could not
Keep her own petty throne in her possession—
Her vassals' scorn—from her own country driven—
Is made to fright you even from her prison.
But in Heaven's name ! what makes her to be fear'd ?
That she lays claim to this kingdom, and that you

Her kinsmen Guise acknowledge not its queen ?
But can the Guises' will annul the right
Given by your birth, and by our Parliament ?
Is she not by King Henry's latest testament
Rejected silently ? and will this land,
Happy in the enjoyment of new light,
Cast itself back into the Papist's arms,
Turning from you their worshipp'd queen, to her,
The murderess of Darnley ? What means this haste,
That while you yet live scares you with your heir—
That cannot fast enough in wedlock fetter you
To save from sudden ruin Church and State ?
Are you not in your bloom of youthful vigour,
While towards her grave she withers day by day ?
God send you long above that grave to tread,
Without the need of thrusting her into it !

BURLEIGH.

Lord Leicester has not always counsell'd so.

LEICESTER.

No ; it is true, my voice was for her death
When we in judgment sat : we're now in council,
And here the question is no more of right,
But of expediency. Is this a time
To fear her dangerous when France forsakes her.
Her sole defender, to whose son your hand

Is promised, while a royal race already
In the people's hope blooms once more o'er the land?
Why put to death one who is dead already?
Contempt is absolute death—beware, lest pity
Call her again into a dangerous life.
My counsel therefore is, that she remain
Under the sentence late pronounced upon her.
Beneath the headsman's axe still let her live;
When the first hand is raised in her defence,
Let it come down.

ELIZABETH (*rising*).

I have your counsel, lords,
And thank you for your zeal. With Heaven's help,
Which doth the souls of kings enlighten,
We will consider them, and on the best
Determine. Hither comes Sir Amias Paulet.
Now, worthy Paulet, what wouldst thou with us?

[*Enter PAULET and MORTIMER.*

PAULET.

Most glorious Majesty, my nephew, late
Return'd from distant travel, at your feet
Casts himself with his youthful fealty;
Graciously deign to accept it, and let him grow
In the good sunshine of your royal favour.

MORTIMER (*kneeling*).

Long live my sovereign Mistress, and may glory
And happiness circle her brow for ever !

ELIZABETH.

Arise ! you 're welcome back to England, sir.
You 've trod the great highway, visited France
And Rome, and rested too at Rheims,
And so can tell what webs our foes are weaving.

MORTIMER.

Confound them, Heaven ! and back to their own breasts
Direct the arrows aim'd against our queen !

ELIZABETH.

Did you see Morgan ? and that plot-spinner
The Bishop of Ross ?

MORTIMER.

With all the Scottish exiles,
Who forge at Rheims their plots against this island,
I held acquaintance, crept into their trust,
That I might gather something of their aims.

PAULET.

Secret epistles for the Queen of Scotland,
Written in cipher, were entrusted to him,
Which faithfully he gave into my hands.

ELIZABETH.

What now resolve they ?

MORTIMER.

Like a thunder-clap,
France's desertion from their cause, and bond with you,
Fell on them. Now towards Spain they turn their
hopes.

ELIZABETH.

So Walsingham writes me.

MORTIMER.

And there came to Rheims,
Even as I parted thence, Pope Sixtus' bull,
Launch'd from the Vatican against your highness ;
'T will reach our shores with the first ship that anchors.

LEICESTER.

England no longer trembles at such weapons.

BURLEIGH.

They may be dangerous yet in fanatic hands.

ELIZABETH (*looking searchingly at MORTIMER*).

You have been accused of studying in the college
At Rheims, and there forswearing your first faith.

MORTIMER.

I thought it well to assume that safe pretence,
And so far went my hope to serve my queen.

ELIZABETH (*to PAULET, who presents a paper to her*).

What tenderest thou there?

PAULET.

To your grace's hand
The Queen of Scotland sends—

BURLEIGH (*hastily extends his hand*).

Give it to me, sir!

PAULET.

By your leave no, my Lord High Treasurer.
Into my royal mistress' hands I swore
I would deliver this; so was I bidden.
Though I am not the Queen of Scotland's friend,
Yet am I but the enemy of her guilt;
Therefore whate'er behest of hers may fit
With my duty, I hold also fit to do.

[ELIZABETH *takes the paper and reads it.*

BURLEIGH (*to PAULET*).

What should it signify? idle complaints,
Wherewith the gentle heart of our noble mistress
Again shall be disturb'd and put in doubt.

PAULET.

She did not hide the matter from me, but
Confess'd she had implored her grace to see her.

BURLEIGH.

Never!

SHREWSBURY.

Why not? methinks she prays right well.

BURLEIGH.

Grace to behold the royal countenance
The murderess hath forfeited! Shall she
Who sought the life of our queen approach her
presence?
Who truly loves and serves our royal mistress,
Will give her no such counsel.

SHREWSBURY.

Nay; but if
Her highness' heart inclines to show her mercy,
Will you turn back the gentle stream of pity?

BURLEIGH.

My lord, it suits not with her grace's honour
To entertain in personal conference
One whom the laws already have condemn'd;
To the axe belongs the head of Mary Stuart,
And if she may come nigh to the queen's presence,

The sentence cannot be fulfill'd : for mercy
And pardoning grace flow from the sov'reign's countenance,
And whoso looks upon her face must live.

ELIZABETH (*wiping her tears after reading the letter*).

O earth ! O men ! O wretched human fortunes !
Where are your roots, prosperity and greatness ?
Whither is she fallen, this so lofty lady,
Whose pride was fed with such high hopes of glory ?
Call'd to the oldest throne of Christendom,
In vain imaginings fed with the dream
That she should wear three crowns upon her head.
In humble speech, I trow, she sues for one
Who dared to assume the royal arms of England,
And suffer'd the fawning things about her court
To call her sovereign of these British Isles.
By Heaven ! my lords, it cuts me to the heart,
And pity and amazement strive within me,
When I behold these shifting tides of chance,
And feel the whiff and wind of these blows of fate,
Striking a royal head so near my own.

SHREWSBURY.

Oh, madam ! God speaks thus to your heart ; incline
Your ear to His heavenly teaching. Heavily
Hath Mary Stuart atoned her heavy guilt,
Reach forth a hand of mercy to her now ;

Into the darkness of the grave which holds her
Descend, and be to her the angel of light.

BURLEIGH.

Madam, be steadfast, nor allow the smart
Of a praiseworthy pity to mislead you ;
Do not your own hands bind, so that hereafter,
That which you would and must, you cannot do.
You cannot show her mercy—may not save her ;
Then give no room to have it said, that you
In scorn and unrelenting hardness went,
To look unmoved on her, whom you condemn'd.

LEICESTER.

My lords, let us confine ourselves within
Our measured duties ; our most gracious queen
Needs not our aid or counsel to determine
What worthiest and best is to be done.
The meeting of two royal kinswomen
Has nought to do with the solemn march of justice.
The laws of England, not our mistress' will,
Have sentenced Mary Stuart, and 't is worthy
The great and noble spirit of our queen,
The gentle impulse of her heart to follow,
Even though the law fulfil its stern decrees.

ELIZABETH.

Leave us, my lords ; we shall the method find
To join with seemliness what pity urges,

And what necessity doth lay upon us.
Now leave us. Mortimer, a word with you.

[*Exeunt all but ELIZABETH and MORTIMER.*]

ELIZABETH (*after observing him keenly for some moments*).

You have shown a daring spirit, and for your years
A most unwonted power of self-command.
Who the hard science of dissimulation
So early learns to use, is ripe betimes,
And o'erleaps years of life's apprenticeship.
Fate beckons you to an exalted path—
I prophesy it; and for your better fortune
I can myself fulfil the prophecy.

MORTIMER.

Exalted sovereign! all I have, and am,
Is to your service utterly devoted.

ELIZABETH.

You have learnt to know the enemies of England,
Their hate irreconcilable towards me,
Their inexhaustible bloody plots against me.
Thus far th' Almighty has protected me,
But still the crown must totter on my brows,
While she yet lives from whom their fanatic zeal
Borrows at once its hope and its pretext.

MORTIMER.

She lives no longer when you so decree it.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, sir ! I thought that I had reach'd the goal,
But find myself no nearer than at first.
I thought to have let the law deal with her,
And keep mine own hands free from blood the while.
The sentence is pronounced ; what have I gain'd
While it is not fulfill'd ? and my command
Alone fulfils it, Mortimer. And I
Must meet the odium of the deed, and cannot
By any means escape the ill-seeming act.
That—that is worst of all !

MORTIMER.

What matters it
How evil may appear that which is right ?

ELIZABETH.

You do not know the world ; each man is judge
Of what each man appears ; no one is judge
What any truly is. I can convince
None of my right ; the more must I take heed
That my share in her death be kept close secret.
Double-faced deeds require the screen of darkness ;
The perilous step is that which we acknowledge ;
And nothing's lost but that which we surrender.

MORTIMER (*significantly*).

Then, had it better been—?

ELIZABETH (*quickly*).

Better? ay, best!

Proceed, fulfil, and bring it to an end—

You are rightly earnest—in the right direction.

Another sort of man are you from your uncle!

MORTIMER.

Did you reveal to him your wishes, madam?

ELIZABETH.

I did so; and I rue it.

MORTIMER.

Pardon him!

The old man's weight of years has made him cautious;
Such venturous deeds require the bolder spirit
Of youth.

ELIZABETH.

May I dare trust you?

MORTIMER.

To your deed

I'll lend my hand. See you to your own fair name.

ELIZABETH.

That will I, when the day shall dawn that brings you
To greet me with the welcome words, 'This night
Is Mary Stuart, thy deadliest enemy, dead.'

MORTIMER.

Madam, depend on me.

ELIZABETH.

But when—when shall I
Lay down my head securely and in peace?

MORTIMER.

The next new moon shall see your fears all ended.

ELIZABETH.

Be cautious, sir ; and let it nothing irk you,
That I must hide my gratitude to you
Under the veil of darkness. Silence ever
Is guardian god of happiness ; and bonds
Sweetest and closest are by mystery tied.

[*Exit* ELIZABETH.]

MORTIMER.

Go, get thee from me, false dissembling queen !
I cheat thee, even as thou cheat'st the world ;
And to betray thee is a righteous deed.
Bear I a murderer's visage ? didst thou read
Upon my forehead custom of fell deeds ?
Yea, trust my arm ! do but hold back thine own ;
Assume the lovely glamour shape of mercy
To the world's gaze, whilst thou in secret reckon'st
Upon my murderous help ; so shall we win
A blessed respite for deliverance.

Thou wilt exalt me ! and from far didst point
To some high guerdon, offer'd to my hope ;
Nay, but wert thou the prize—thou, and thy favour,
What were such prize to me ?—what canst thou give ?
No idle vanity seduces me.

Near her alone life's aspect wears a charm ;
Round her for ever hovers the divinity
Of grace, and loveliness, and youthful joy ;
The bliss of heaven blooms upon her breast,
And dead and wither'd are thy proffer'd gifts.
Highest of earthly joys that earth can grant,
Is where one heart, enchanting and enchanted,
In self-oblivious ecstasy bestows itself
Upon another heart. A woman's crown
Was never thine, for thou didst never yet,
Loving thyself, give rapture to a lover !
I must seek out Lord Leicester, and deliver
Her letter to him ; 't is a hateful task ;
I bear the shining courtier small good will.
I can alone deliver her ; and mine
Be danger, glory, and the precious prize !

[*Enter* PAULET.

PAULET.

What said the queen to thee ?

MORTIMER.

Nothing ; that is—

Nothing of any moment.

PAULET.

Hear me, Mortimer ;
The ground on which thou tread'st is slippery smooth ;
And princes' favours have a beckoning aspect
To youth athirst for honour and for fame.
Let not ambition lead thy feet astray.

MORTIMER.

Was't not yourself who brought me to the Court ?

PAULET.

Well wish I that I had not done so. Not
At Court was the honour of our house built up.
Nephew, stand steadfast ! purchase not too dear ;
Wound not thy conscience.

MORTIMER.

Uncle ! why, how now—
What means this sudden apprehension ?

PAULET.

Heed not the queen's fair promises of greatness ;
Trust not her flattering words. She'll disavow thee
When thou hast obey'd her ; and to wash
The stain from her own name, she will avenge
The bloody deed that she herself commanded.

MORTIMER.

The bloody deed !

PAULET.

Away with thy dissembling !
I know that which the queen demanded of thee.
She hopes thy youth, greedy for self-advancement,
Will prove more pliant than my stiffer age.
Say—hast thou promised ? hast thou—say ?

MORTIMER.

Why, uncle—

PAULET.

And if thou hast, I curse and cast thee off !

[*Enter the* EARL OF LEICESTER.

LEICESTER.

One word with your nephew, worthiest sir, allow me ;
The queen is graciously inclined to favour him,
And wills the person of the Lady Stuart
Shall be entrusted solely to his keeping.
On his uprightness she depends implicitly.

PAULET.

Does she so ?—good !

LEICESTER.

What say you, sir ?

PAULET.

The queen
Depends on him, it seems ; and I, my lord,
Will on myself depend, and trust my eyes.

[*Exit* PAULET.

LEICESTER (*astonished*).

What ails your worthy uncle? '

MORTIMER.

Nay, I know not;

Perchance this unexpected trust of the queen—

LEICESTER (*observing him attentively*).

And are you, sir, one to be safely trusted?

MORTIMER.

I might reply in your own words, my lord.

LEICESTER.

You 've something to impart to me in secret, then?

MORTIMER.

First give me some assurance that I may.

LEICESTER.

And who for you shall give me like security?

Pray do not take my slight distrust amiss;

Here in this court I see you wear two faces;

One is of course a mask—but which is not?

MORTIMER.

Even so my lord of Leicester seems to me.

LEICESTER.

Which of us two shall trust the other first?

MORTIMER.

He that has least to venture.

LEICESTER.

Then, speak you !

MORTIMER.

Rather, speak you my lord ! your testimony,
You, the all-powerful, all-favour'd noble,
May fell me to the earth, mine could do nothing
Against your lofty station and great favour.

LEICESTER.

Sir, you're deceived : in all respects but one,
I am powerful here ; but on that tender point,
Which I must now deliver to your faith,
I am in all this court the least secure,
And who is treacherous to me there can ruin me.

MORTIMER.

From you to me, Lord Leicester, such avowal
Exalts me from my humbler state so far,
That I may venture to assume more honour,
And give you a magnanimous example.

LEICESTER.

So do ; I'll follow without faltering.

MORTIMER (*hastily drawing forth the letter*).

The Queen of Scotland sends you this, my lord !

LEICESTER (*eagerly and apprehensively seizing it*).

For God's love, sir, speak low ! ' What do I see !

Ah, 't is her image !

[*He kisses the picture and remains gazing at it.*]

MORTIMER (*observing him searchingly while he reads*).

I believe in you, my lord.

LEICESTER (*after rapidly reading*).

Are the contents of this known to you, sir ?

MORTIMER.

No, I know nothing.

LEICESTER.

Ha ! yet she has doubtless

Trusted—

MORTIMER.

Nothing ; she said you'd solve the riddle
Of this strange mystery, therefore give me leave
To speak th' unfeign'd amazement of my mind,
That you, her open foe, her persecutor,
One of her judges, and Elizabeth's favourite,
Are he from whom the queen looks for deliverance !
And yet it must be so, for your eyes speak
Clearly enough what your heart feels for her.

LEICESTER.

First let me know whence comes the fiery zeal
You spend upon her cause? and by what means
You have deserved the confidence she shows you?

MORTIMER.

For that few words suffice. I changed my faith
At Rome, and to the House of Guise swore fealty,
And a letter from the Archbishop of Rheims
Commended my poor service to the queen.

LEICESTER.

I knew of this conversion of your faith,
It first invited me to trust in you;
Give me your hand, and pardon my suspicion!
Too cautious can I hardly be, for Walsingham
And Burleigh hate me, and I know their nets
Are stretch'd for me; you might have been
Their instrument or creature to decoy me to them.

MORTIMER.

What, are the courtly gyves so strait, the bonds
So narrow that Lord Leicester's steps are shackled?
My lord, I pity you!

LEICESTER.

Joyfully then,
I cast myself upon your friendly breast,
And throw aside the long-oppressing burden.

You are amazed, sir, at the sudden change
In the feelings I profess towards Mary Stuart;
But I was never her real enemy,
Though the strong current of events opposed me to her.
Destin'd to me long years before, to Darnley
They gave her hand—then, with a throne for dower
I would not wed her—now, in captivity,
Even to the gates of death I seek and claim her.

MORTIMER.

Why it is nobly done!—

LEICESTER.

The times are alter'd —

Then vainly did the crown of Scotland beckon me,
And with it the youth and beauty that adorn'd it,
For in my ambition's eager grasp I thought
To clutch a greater prize—the crown of England.

MORTIMER.

It is well known you were preferred to all.

LEICESTER.

It seem'd so, sir; yet now, after ten years
Of creeping, cringing, crouching, crawling slavery,
Base years! for ever wasted—oh, my heart
Will to my lips heave up its bitterness!
Yea, doubtless, all men count me fortunate.
Oh, if they knew the galling weight of the chains

They envy me ! Daily, for ten long years,
Have I my life to this vain idol offer'd,
Each hourly change of fierce despotic humour
Bent, bow'd, and turn'd me to—the wretched play-
thing

Of each fantastic whim, of wayward wantonness,
Fondled and fool'd with short-lived tenderness,
Thrust back with cold and insolent disdain,
Tormented by her passion or her pride,
The close-watch'd prisoner of her lynx-eyed jealousy,
School'd like a boy, and chidden like a groom ;
Words have no utterance for this ten years' hell !

MORTIMER.

I pity you, my lord !

LEICESTER.

And now the prize,
E'en as I touch the goal escapes my grasp—
Another comes and reaps my hard-earn'd harvest,
A blooming boy-consort seizes my right,
And I must now come down from the lofty stage
Where for so long I shone i' the foremost place ;
For I shall lose her favour with her hand—
Of that the new comer will rob me too,—
He is a proper lover—she's a woman !

MORTIMER.

Katherine de Medici's son in a good school
Has learnt the art of wily flattery.

LEICESTER.

So fall my hopes ! but in this w'reck I seek
The plank of rescue that shall save my fortunes ;
Towards my fair early hopes I turn mine eyes,
And Mary's image in her beauty's splendour
Rises before me : grace and loveliness
Again assert their right—no cold ambition—
But my heart's sentence of comparison
Points to the jewel I had cast away.
With horror I behold the misery
In which she's plunged—plunged even by my guilt,
And once again the hope awakes in me,
That I may yet both rescue and possess her.
Through some trustworthy hand it now behoves me
To lay before her eyes my alter'd heart.
And in this letter you have brought I read
That she forgives, and will bestow herself—
Fair prize !—upon me, if I rescue her.

MORTIMER.

Meantime what have you done to rescue her ?
You have allowed her trial to proceed,
And given your own voice to her final sentence ;
A miracle must happen—the light of truth
Must be reveal'd suddenly to me—
To me, the kinsman of her prison keeper,
From Rome—from the chambers of the Vatican—
Must heaven summon her deliverer,
Or never had deliverance come nigh her

LEICESTER.

Anguish enough, good sir, her fate has cost me !
From Talbot's Castle brought to Fotheringay,
She was transferr'd to your uncle's vigilant guard,
And all approach to her barr'd and impossible ;
Still was I fain in the world's eyes to seem
The enemy and persecutor—yet never
Believe that I had suffer'd her to perish :
I hoped—I hope—to snatch her yet from death,
The final thrust of this dark doom to parry,
Until some means are found to snatch her from it.

MORTIMER.

Then they are found—Lord Leicester, to your trust
I answer with like faith—the means are found
For the queen's rescue,—therefore am I here ;
All is prepared, all thought for, all begun,
And your great name ensures a happy ending.

LEICESTER.

Death and dismay ! what is 't you say ? my name !

MORTIMER.

By open force will I unbar her prison,
And those whose hands are eager for the task,
Banded with me—

LEICESTER.

Confusion—a conspiracy!

In what a net art thou entangling me?

What, do thy followers possess my secret?

MORTIMER.

Oh, set your heart at rest, my lord, our plan
Had been well knit, and you ne'er laid a finger to it,
But that the queen, forsooth, would owe her life
To none but you.

LEICESTER.

In your secret conference

My name has ne'er been utter'd?—swear it.

MORTIMER.

Never!

How cautious is my Lord of Leicester grown—
How cold, to one that brings his best hopes help!
What! is it you would save the queen and wed her,
And when her faithful servants spring to meet you,
And Heaven fits instruments to your very hand,
You show far more confusion and dismay
Than joy?

LEICESTER.

No—not by open force—by violence;
This suddenness is dangerous—

MORTIMER.

Delay

Is dangerous too.

LEICESTER.

Sir—sir—it cannot be ;

'T is not to be thought on.

MORTIMER (*bitterly*).

Not by you, my lord,

Who love and would possess the queen ; but we,

Who only seek to set her free, may venture it.

LEICESTER.

Young man, you are too rash to find a way

Through such a thick set path of perilous thorns.

MORTIMER.

And you in the road of honour—most considerate.

LEICESTER.

I see the snares by which we are beset.

MORTIMER.

I feel the strength to break my way through them.

LEICESTER.

Foolhardiness and madness is such courage !

MORTIMER.

And a weak prudence hardly valour, lord.

LEICESTER.

Hast thou a mind to die the death of Babington?

MORTIMER.

You have no mind to rival Norfolk's glory.

LEICESTER.

Norfolk embraced the bloody axe—not Mary.

MORTIMER.

He show'd the world that he was worthy of her.

LEICESTER.

If we should fail, we drag her down with us.

MORTIMER.

Hugging our safety will not conquer hers.

LEICESTER.

Nay, but you hear not—you consider not—
And will, in blind impatience, overthrow
What was e'en now so fairly on the way.

MORTIMER.

So fairly on the way—by you made ready?
But say, what have you done to rescue her?

Say rather, what, had I been fool enough
To murder her, as e'en now Elizabeth bade me,
(And at this very hour believes 't is done),
Speak! say, what had you done to save her life?

LEICESTER (*amazed*).

The queen gave you that bloody order?

MORTIMER.

Yes, sir—

Elizabeth's as much deceived in me
As Mary is in you—they both are cheated.

LEICESTER.

So then, you promised her compliance, did you then?

MORTIMER.

Lest she should borrow other hands, I offer'd
To lend her mine.

LEICESTER.

Why, that was wisely done;
That gives us space and room to move; relying
Upon a bloody secret service, she
Will let the sentence unfulfill'd remain,
Meanwhile we are gaining time.

MORTIMER (*impatiently*).

No, we are losing it!

LEICESTER.

She reckons upon you, and all the less
Will scruple to assume the mask of mercy;
Perhaps by courtier-craft I may persuade her
Her rival's countenance once to behold,
And such a step must bind her hands for ever;
Burleigh is right, if once they meet, the sentence
Can never be fulfill'd. It shall be so;
I'll venture all to bring them face to face.

MORTIMER.

And then what have you gain'd when she beholds
Her hopes in me deceived? If Mary lives
Shall not all things remain as they are now?
Will she be free? Never! her mildest fate
Must be but this life-long captivity.
In Heaven's name! do you not see an act
Of daring must at last be her redemption?
Choose, then, at first, the noblest way to win her.
You have the power, a host starts at your call,
Of your own followers and retainers only;
Mary has many secret, faithful friends;
The noble house of Howard, and of Percy,
Have heroes ready still to die for her,
Did but a powerful hand uplift her standard.
Away with cunning! open be the warfare!
Like a true knight set lance in rest for your love,
And fight one loyal fight to win your lady;

Why, if your will were set to a deed of daring,
Elizabeth's person might you well surprise ;
Not seldom to your castles and your mansions
She has deign'd to come a guest, let her remain
A prisoner for awhile, then play the man ;
Speak, for she then must hear, nor set her free
Till Mary's freedom you have won from her.

LEICESTER.

Amazement ! horror ! whither does madness urge thee !
Know'st thou the earth that thou art standing on ?
Deemest thou what 't is to breathe here in this court ?
And the tremendous spell this woman's rule
Has thrown o'er all men's faculties ? would'st seek
For the free spirit that once lived in the land ?
It is lock'd up, the key at a woman's girdle,
And every wing of noble daring fetter'd.
Follow my warning—nothing venture rashly.
Some one draws near ; leave me.

MORTIMER.

And Mary hopes !
Is this the empty comfort I must bear to her ?

LEICESTER.

Bear her my vow of everlasting love !

MORTIMER.

Bear it yourself ! instrument of her rescue
I hither came—not your love messenger.

[*Exit* MORTIMER.]

[*Enter* ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH.

Who parted from you there? sure I heard voices.

LEICESTER (*with sudden alarm and confusion*).

'T was Mortimer.

ELIZABETH.

How now, my lord, what ails you?

You're all amazed!

LEICESTER (*commanding himself*).

Oh, well may I be so
By the dazzling splendour of your loveliness!
Never moreauteous did these eyes behold you.
Ah!—

ELIZABETH.

Wherefore do you sigh?

LEICESTER.

I have cause,
Madam, for no rare merriment methinks,
When, looking on the beauty that enslaves me,
I am reminded of my grievous loss.

ELIZABETH.

Thy loss?

LEICESTER.

You have I lost, your precious self;
Soon in the arms of a youthful bridegroom, you

Shall forget all, but your own full content,
And he shall have your undivided heart.
He is of royal race—so am not I—
And yet bear witness, Heaven ! if this earth's round
Holds one that worships you as I do ! He,
The Duke of Anjou, never has beheld you ;
Your fame, your pow'r, your greatness, he may love ;
Alas ! but I love you ; had you been born
A shepherd lass, and I the king o' the earth,
From my great height I had come down to you,
And laid my crown beneath your feet.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, Dudley !

Blame me not—pity me—I dare not question
My heart, its answer do I know by heart :
Oh ! how I envy those more fortunate women
Who may make great the men they love. I may not
Divide my throne with him who owns my heart ;
Yet Mary Stuart might—she was so happy—
Her heart went with her hand, she crown'd her husband,
And mingling love and power in one deep draught
Of perfect joy, she drank her fill.

LEICESTER.

And now
She drinks the dregs of sorrow drop by drop.

ELIZABETH.

She heeded not men's judgments, she ; to her,
Light was the burthen of her light life ; never
Did she bow down her neck to the heavy yoke
That I have stoop'd to ; I, too, might have seized
Days full of happiness, and nights of pleasure,
But rather chose the kingly servitude,
And royal task of righteous government ;
But ev'n for that, because she never strove
To be more than a woman, she has now
All men to be her lovers and her servants,
And leads in willing thralldom old and young ;
Such are ye men ! wantons, I trow, at heart,
Wantonness only is your proper lure,
And to 't ye fly, where'er it beckons you,
Nor ever love what will be honour'd too.
Did not old greybeard Talbot glow to a flame
While talking of her loveliness, forsooth ?

LEICESTER.

Poor gentleman ! he was her keeper once.
She hath bewitch'd him with her honey'd speech.

ELIZABETH.

Can it be true that she is still so fair ?
I'm weary hearing of this goodly favour,
And could be well content to trust my eyes,

Rather than lying pictures and reports
In this weighty matter; why dost look at me
So earnestly?

LEICESTER.

Methought I saw you standing
Beside the Queen of Scots. I would I might
Behold you so indeed! for then, dear mistress,
Should you a woman's proper victory know.
With envious eyes, and envy's eyes are keen,
I saw her running o'er the fair assemblage
Of your good graces, which should show to her
Beauty's own image fitly framed in virtue.

ELIZABETH.

She is the younger of the two.

LEICESTER.

Indeed!

No one would think it; but her sorrows doubtless
Have aged her looks something before the time.
It might, indeed, be doubly bitter to her
Now, as a bride, first to encounter you;
The joys of life are far behind her fled,
While you behold them towards yourself advancing;
The bride, too, of the King of France's son—
Of France, upon whose kindred and assistance
She has so proudly and securely reckon'd.

ELIZABETH.

I'm much besought to visit her.

LEICESTER.

As grace

She prays it, let it be her punishment;
True, you can send her to the bloody block,
But not the axe shall give so sharp a stroke
To her body, as your aspect to her soul;
As seeing her own light put out by yours,
As is each petty paling star by the sun.
Thus shall you pay her back those stabs she sought
To give you—and do keener execution
On her than could the headsman—showing her
The triumph of your loveliness and glory,
With reverence crown'd, as well as pow'r, and greatness;
Clothed and embellish'd by that spotless fame
Which she did wantonly strip off and cast from her;
The splendour of your crown, and love's soft radiance,
Making a brightness round you. When she thus
Beholds you—then, that is her hour of doom!
And why not even now? for in this hour,
Arm'd as for victory I see you stand,
And saw you ne'er more fair! This very hour—

ELIZABETH.

This very hour!—now! No, no, Leicester, this
Must be well thought on; I must speak with Burleigh.

LEICESTER.

Burleigh knows nought but reasons of the state !
Unto your womanhood some rights belong,
And to judge in this matter is your right.
And reasons of the state approve it too ;
The common voice shall cry well done to it,
That you with pity visit your deadly foe,
Howe'er the law shall deal with her hereafter.

ELIZABETH.

Natheless methinks it were not well to see
My kinswoman brought to such low estate ;
'T is said, indeed I know, she lives not royally,
And scarcely may receive a royal visit
With honour to us both.

LEICESTER.

Over the threshold
Of her prison you need not step ; but hear my counsel—
Chance serves us to a wish ; the hunt to-day
Leads towards the neighbourhood of Fotheringay.
Let Mary Stuart have leave to walk abroad,
And in the park, what hinders that you meet her,
When none shall think the act premeditate ?
Nay, if your majesty deign'd not to speak—

ELIZABETH.

Servant, if this approve itself a folly,
Thine be the blame, not mine ! To-day,

No wish of thine will I gainsay—I owe thee
Some compensation for this French betrothal;
Be it as thou hast said. Liking weighs not
Each several grace it grants, else 't were no liking;
So, my good Leicester, we'll towards Fotheringay.

[LEICESTER *throws himself at her feet ;*
the curtain falls.

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE 1.

A park outside of Fotheringay Castle; a distant prospect.

Enter hastily MARY; KENNEDY following her.

KENNEDY.

Whither so fast, madam? You almost run;
I'm cramp'd with age and lack of exercise;
You fly, my old joints ache to follow you

MARY.

Over the greensward, oh, let my feet stray,
Light wing'd with joy as in childhood's bright day;
Cast off thy age as I wipe off my tears.
Have I come forth from that prison of years?
Has the dark vault yielded up its sad prey?
Do I once more greet the splendour of day?
Oh, let me, 'scaped from that den of despair,
Drink in long draughts the free heavenly air.

KENNEDY.

O my beloved mistress—out, alas!
Your prison bounds are but a little widen'd;
You do not see the walls that shut you in
Because the green boughs hide them.

MARY.

Bless them!

Oh, bless them that they hide my prison from me!

Let me dream out my dream of joy, dear Kennedy !
Bid me not wake to weep—I've wept so long !
Above my head the boundless heavens bend smiling,
My eyes roam far, far o'er the distant prospect !
See there ! there, yonder ! where the misty mountains
Melt in the hazy sky ! Beyond lies Scotland—
My land, my home, my kingdom ! Look ! the clouds
Are hastening to the south, across the sea
They go towards France ! look ! look ! they go towards
France !

Fast sailing vapours, ye ships of the air,
Whom are ye steer'd by ?—who do ye bear ?
Ah, greet for me the sweet home of my youth—
Straight bound in fetters, a pris'ner I lie—
Be ye my envoys, bright clouds of the sky !
Free through the free air ye wing your swift way,
England's proud queen over you holds no sway.

KENNEDY.

Madam ! good madam !—finding suddenly
Her long lost freedom, she has lost herself !

MARY.

See on the beach rocks the fisherman's boat !
Oh ! on that poor wretched skiff could I float
Far from these shores to a friendlier strand ;
Hardly it yields to its owner's hard hand
Bread, with sore toil—I would heap it with gold,

Once should his nets gather treasure untold,
Might but his boat bear me off from this land!

KENNEDY.

Wild hopeless vision ! see you not from far
That we are watch'd and follow'd ? instant ruin
Glares on each thing that would show pity to us,
And scares it from our path.

MARY.

No, no, good Hannah !

Trust me, my prison bars have not in vain
Open'd themselves at last to let me forth.
This favour shown me is the gracious harbinger
Of justice and of right. It is no mockery ;
I know the dear and powerful hand that thus
Gently is drawing me from out my dungeon ;
I know it is the might of love, and Leicester,
That loosens thus my bitter prison cords ;
They will be slacken'd day by day, until
In a blessed hour they fall away from me,
And I shall be free !

KENNEDY.

And yet I cannot
Make match these contradictions ! Yesterday,
Death was announced to you, death close at hand ;
'Tis true, indeed, their shackles are struck off,
Who stand on the threshold of eternal freedom.

[*Horns in the forest.*

MARY.

Hear'st thou the hunter's horn? hear'st thou it ringing
Cheerily sounding through forest and fell?
Oh, on my good horse once more to be springing
Far, far away, over mountain and dell!
Oh! what a doleful echo doth it wake,
That merry music! On the hills of Scotland,
Over the golden gorse and purple heather,
The live-long day how I have followed it!

[Enter PAULET.

PAULET.

Now, madam! will you say at last, 'Well done,'
And give me once your thanks?

MARY.

How, sir?—what mean you?

Is it to you I owe this hour of life?—
To you?

PAULET.

I do believe so; to the queen
I gave your letter.

MARY.

You did give it her
To her own hand—indeed—and this great boon
Was thus won for me?

PAULET.

Nor this boon alone,

Be you prepared to welcome a yet greater.

MARY.

A greater boon!—what may this mean?

PAULET.

Do you hear

The hunters' horns in the forest?

MARY.

Sir, you fright me.

PAULET.

The queen is hunting there, and presently

Comes hither.

[MARY *falls in the arms of* KENNEDY.]

KENNEDY.

Madam, why, how now, dearest lady?

You are all pale and cold.

PAULET.

What not content!

Falls it not right at last—was 't not your suit?

Is 't not more quickly granted than you hoped for?

Till now you never lack'd persuasive words.

Do you stand speechless?—now is the very hour

To speak, and to good purpose.

MARY.

Why was I not
Forewarn'd—prepared? Not now—I cannot—no—
I'm lost! I am not mistress of myself—
That which as highest mercy I implored
Fills me with sudden terror and amazement.
Lead me hence, Hannah—my distracted sense
Let me collect.

PAULET.

Nay, madam, you must wait
Her highness here—yet, can I well believe
The sight of your judge appals you.

[Enter SHREWSBURY.]

MARY.

Not so, sir—
O noble Shrewsbury!—good friend—you're come
Like Heaven's own angel to my utmost need!
I cannot see her—save me—save me from
Her hated aspect—

SHREWSBURY.

I beseech your grace
Come to yourself;—courage, good madam—courage
For 't is the very hour of fate for you.

MARY.

Oh, I have long'd for it—yearn'd—hunger'd for it—
And wearied God with prayers to bring it on;

For years conn'd o'er my task of humble sueing ;
In my long prison nights, said, o'er and o'er,
Each sad and moving plea, wherewith I thought
To touch her heart—it's gone !—it's all forgotten !
Words of entreaty—tears of supplication,
All gone—I can remember nothing,—nothing
But the burning smart of my great injuries !
My heart swells in my breast full of fierce hate—
Of bloody hate—all gentle thoughts forsake me,
And rattling their snaky hair, the furies of hell
Stand round me, yelling frenzy in my ears !

SHREWSBURY.

Madam, for the love of God beat down the rash
Temptation of your agony ! Let not the gall
That chokes you, rise to your tongue ;—nay, but be
patient ;
What good can come of it when hate meets hate.
Wrestle, good madam, with your bitterness.
Remember all that hangs on this one hour,
Think of her power, dear queen ! and bow yourself.

MARY.

Before her—never !—

SHREWSBURY.

Do it—yea, do it, madam !
Speak to her gently, with self-government ;
Be great in patience, and forget your wrongs

Forget your rights too,—this is not the hour,
When they may safely be remember'd by you.

MARY.

I have pull'd down my ruin on my own head :
God curses me with granting of my prayer.
No, we should never meet each other's eyes ;
No good can come of it—but dire misfortune.
Water and fire shall lovingly compound,
And wolves and lambs feed friendly side by side,
Ere we can meet in peace ; too deep the wound
Has fester'd in my breast,—too heavily
Her iron hand has ground me down. No, never
Can a true reconciliation grow between us.

SHREWSBURY.

Yet stay, and look upon her countenance—
I saw her when from reading of your letter
She raised her eyes, and they were full of tears ;
She is not flinty-hearted. Good your grace !
Yourself had gentler thoughts when you writ to her.
That you should dress your speech in kindness,
And meet her sisterly, I have hurried hither
To warn you of her coming.

MARY.

Excellent Talbot !

You ever were my friend. Oh, had I ne'er •

Been ta'en away from your house—O Shrewsbury !
My heart and soul quail with dismay—

SHREWSBURY.

Forget—

Look not behind—fasten your thoughts alone
On the blest hope this hour may win for you.

MARY.

Comes Burleigh, too—my evil angel, with her ?

SHREWSBURY.

None comes but the Earl of Leicester with the queen.

MARY.

Lord Leicester !

SHREWSBURY.

Nothing need you fear from him.
He wills no evil to you—'t is his deed
Her highness hath consented to this meeting.

MARY.

Oh, I was sure of it !

SHREWSBURY.

What say you, madam ?

PAULET.

The queen

[*All withdraw on one side, except MARY, who remains leaning on KENNEDY. Enter ELIZABETH and LEICESTER followed by her train.*

ELIZABETH.

What place is this?

LEICESTER.

Fotheringay Castle.

ELIZABETH (*to SHREWSBURY*).

Send on our train towards London, sir; the throng

Chokes all the roads and clamours at our heels.

We'll breathe awhile here, in this leafy stillness.

[*TALBOT dismisses the train. ELIZABETH fixes her eyes on MARY, and continues speaking to PAULET.*

This is too much; our good folk love us well,

But lack some measure in their show of love.

So men should worship God, not earthly kings;

And such a loyalty smacks of idolatry.

MARY

(*who has continued leaning on KENNEDY, raises herself, and turning, her eyes encounter the gaze ELIZABETH fastens on her: she shudders, and throws herself back on KENNEDY*).

O God! no heart looks from those horny eyes.

ELIZABETH.

Who is that woman?

LEICESTER.

May it please your majesty,
This place is Fotheringay.

ELIZABETH.

Ha! who has dared
Do this?

LEICESTER.

By Heaven, madam, are you led hither;
And now, let pity have its perfect work.

SHREWSBURY.

Oh, royal lady, be compassionate!
With mercy look on the unfortunate,
Sinking beneath the terrors of your aspect.

ELIZABETH.

Why, how is this, my lords? ye prate to us
Of one bow'd down in lowliness and sorrow,
But we can see nought save a haughty dame,
Whose pride defies sorrow and us.

MARY.

It must be;
To this humility will I constrain myself—
Bow down, proud head; bend, stubborn knees, to the
dust;
And thou my throbbing heart, forget—forget.

[*She kneels.*]

Heaven sides with you, my sister ; in your fortune,
I honour its inscrutable decrees ;
To your prosperity I bow my misery,
And worship in your power the Power that made it.
But now, be merciful as you are great !
Queen, suffer not your hapless kinswoman
To stoop her forehead to the dust in vain :
O sister, reach to me your hand, and raise me.

ELIZABETH.

Heaven judges justly, and has righteously
Assign'd to each of us our rightful place ;
And I may thank its mercy, and not yours,
That I am not laid lower even than you.

MARY.

Oh, yet bethink yourself, how change supreme
Rules all the destinies of human fortunes !
God takes delight in humbleness, not pride.
Fear Him, that King of the kings of the earth,
Who casts me prostrate underneath your feet.
For the sake of those who gaze upon us, honour
Yourself in honouring me, and do not shame
The royal blood of Tudor in both our veins :—
O God of heaven ! stand not stony thus,
Like to the inaccessible crag, that throws
The drowning wretch that clasps it back again
To the devouring sea ; my hope, my fate,

My life, hangs on my might of prayers and tears ;
Loose the hard gripe with which you've seized my
 heart,
Or how can I touch yours ! Your icy look
Freezes my senses up ; my tears congeal ;
My words can find no voice for this cold terror.

ELIZABETH.

What would you say ? You have urged speech with
 me,
And I forget my state and your devices,
And come to hear you plead—yea, sisterly,
To grant the comfort of my sight to you.
Nought have I hearken'd to but the kind counsel
Of pity ; and some blame, moreover, bear I,
That I in this too much demean myself,
And run, perhaps, some danger—for my life
Has not been always safe, for your good will.

MARY.

How shall I speak ? wherewith shall I begin ?
What words shall I choose to soothe and not offend
 you ?
Give me, my God ! persuading speech, and blunt
The edge of every sharp, impatient thought,
That she may feel no touch save that of pity !
And yet—and yet—how can I clear myself
And not blame you ? It is impossible !

For you have evil dealt with me—indeed
You have. Am I not even as you a queen?
And you have made a wretched prisoner of me.
I came a suppliant to you, and against
The holy human law of hospitality,
And general law of nations, you have kept me
Lock'd in a dungeon; all my friends, my servants,
Have I been cruelly divided from;
Unworthy niggard stint have I endured
In my daily life—before a base tribunal
Have I been dragg'd—Enough! henceforth for ever,
Let thick forgetfulness hide all I've suffer'd!
Nay, fate has been to blame, not you, or I;
Some evil spirit, from the dark depths of hell,
Has had Heaven's leave to sow this hate between us,
And even from our youth set us at discord;
The bitter root grew with our growth, and men
Like devils, fit to work with devils, fann'd
The evil flame with breath accursed; the madness
Of bigot zeal thrust weapons into hands
Unknown to each of us, against the other;
For 'tis the curse of kings, that their disunion
Divides the world, and in a thousand hearts
Their hate begets more hate. But all is over!
No strangeness hides us from each other now,
We look into each other's eyes at last;
Now, speak, good sister! tell me all my faults,
And I will give you ample satisfaction:

Oh, wherefore, long ago—long, long ago—
Did you not grant my earnest prayer to see you?
It had ne'er come to this—never had we had
A meeting such as this, in such a place.

ELIZABETH.

My better angel kept me from the danger
Of taking to my breast the frozen viper;
Blame fate for nothing! blame the bitter grudge
You've ever borne me—your house's mad ambition,
Which enviously hath still waged war against me—
That insolent priest, your uncle's lust of power,
Whose bold hands have been stretch'd towards every
crown,
That he might hope to grasp—he 't was that fool'd you
To the pitch of daring to assume my arms
And style, crazy defiance casting in my teeth.
Whom hath he not made his allies against me?
The voice of the pulpit, and the people's arm,
The death-devoted knife of frantic ecstasy;
Here in my very kingdom, freedom's seat and dwelling-
place,
Hath he blown up the fierce flame of sedition.
But God is on my side! the haughty priest
Hath not prevail'd—another aim, I trow,
He reaches, than the one he reckon'd on;
He struck at my head, but he has struck yours.

MARY.

God's will be done ! but yet, I do believe
You will not mark so bloodily your victory.

ELIZABETH.

And wherefore shall I not ? and who shall hinder me ?
Your uncle hath a good example given,
To all the kings of the earth, how foes are dealt with ;
His hallowing of St. Bartholomew's day
Is a rare lesson—yea, and I will follow it.
What tell you me of kindred, and of rights,
Relationship of blood, or bond of kingship ?
Go to—go to—your Church can loose all ties,
And perjury or regicide make holy ;
I will but practise what your priests do preach.
Say rather, if I were to set you free,
With what lock shall I fasten up your faith,
That may not by St. Peter's keys be open'd ?
That I do hold you—that, is my only safety ;
What compact shall be made with the serpent's seed ?

MARY.

This has been still your bitter policy ;
As foe and stranger have you always dealt with me.
Had you, according to my right, proclaim'd me,
Your next successor, you had found in me
A loving, faithful friend, and kinswoman.

ELIZABETH.

Treachery is your friendship—the Pope of Rome
Is your only father, and his priests your brothers;
These are your kinsfolk. Yea, forsooth,
Proclaim you my successor! while I yet live,
Give o'er my people to your damnable creed,
And see the noble youth of my realm all snared
By the crafty sorceries of a new Armida;
Direct th' expecting gaze of my whole kingdom
To the rising sun, while I—

MARY.

Reign, reign in peace!

All claim to your succession I forego;
My spirit's wings are lame and shatter'd—never
Towards any noble aim shall they soar again;
You have your will of me—alas! I am
No more but the shadow of poor Mary Stuart!
My heart is broken by long prison sorrow.
You have done your utmost—in my flow'r of life
You have struck me down, and I shall bloom no more.
Now, make an end my sister! Speak at last
The word you are come to speak—for I will not think
You have come hither but to mock my ruin;
Pronounce it royally at once:—'You're free;
My power have you felt, now know my mercy.'
Say it—oh, say it! and my life and freedom
Even as a boon, I will receive from you!

One word can give me both—I wait for it;
Let me not wait too long, or wait in vain.
Woe be to you if with that word of mercy,
This dreadful conference does not end!—if you
Depart not like an angel, leaving blessings,
Look you not for the glory of your kingdom;
Nay, not for all the kingdoms of the earth
Would I be what you then would seem to me.

ELIZABETH.

So, then! you own yourself at length o'ercome!
Are all your practices spent? what, no more murders
Hatching? what, not one wild adventurer left
To lift his lance in hopeless battle for you?
Yea, you have said it, all is over now;
And I think well, the world hath other cares,
And worthier, than you, or your lost fortunes.
I think your means of mischief are worn out;
No, no, you will snare no more of my subjects' hearts
With your spent spells; nor will you readily find
One who shall covet to be your fourth husband,
Or your next champion—for you're deadly to them
Alike.

MARY.

God give me patience! sister—sister—

ELIZABETH.

So these, my Lord of Leicester, are the graces
That no man without love might look upon,

Or woman without envy !—verily,
We know of old the worth of general rumour ;
But there 's some justice in its lying here—
A liberal life trumpets a comeliness
That might have lack'd renown wedded to modesty ;
A common fame becomes a common beauty.

MARY.

This is too much !—

ELIZABETH.

Ah ! now we see at last
The proper face ! before 't was but a mask.

MARY.

Beware lest ever yours should fall—beware !
Humanly and in youthful heat I sinn'd,
Tempted alike by power and by weakness ;
'T is true, I have not hidden or denied it ;
No base pretences have I stoop'd to wear
To cover what was ill in me—the worst
That can be known of me, the world doth know,
And I dare say, I'm better than it counts me.
Take heed if ever from your life be stripp'd
The goodly cloak of decency that hides
The hidden fires of secret lust—take heed !
Your chastity comes not by inheritance,
For it is known what virtues led your mother,
Anne Bullen, to the block.

SHREWSBURY.

O Heaven! what words—

Is this your humbleness—is this your patience?

MARY.

Patience! have I not borne what may be borne
By mortal flesh and blood—patience! away,
Away to Heaven long-suffering, meek humility;
From thy deep hell come forth, imprison'd hate;
And thou, who to the enraged basilisk
Hast given its deadly glance, make thou my tongue
A poison'd dart, to pierce that stony breast!

SHREWSBURY.

Oh she is mad! forgive her—heed her not—
Listen not to the ravings of her frenzy.

LEICESTER.

Hence, madam, hence from this accursed place!

MARY.

A bastard fills the royal seat of England,
And cheats the loyal-hearted English people!
Had fate been just, usurper! you had been
A suppliant at my feet—and I, your queen.

[*Exeunt hurriedly* ELIZABETH, SHREWSBURY, and LEICESTER.]

KENNEDY.

What have you done! oh, miserable princess!
She goes in frenzy hence who ne'er forgives.

MARY.

I have struck home ! the venom 's in her heart !
My tears, my sorrows, my despair, my shame,
Her tyranny, her hate, her insolent scorn,
The bitterness of years—I 've heaved it off ;
The debt of half a life of injuries,
I have paid it with a word ! oh, let me breathe !

KENNEDY.

Before her lover's eyes you have debased her.

MARY.

Before *my* lover's eyes I 've humbled her ;
His presence lifted me above myself,
And as I hurl'd defiance at my rival,
Leicester stood by and own'd me for his queen.

[*Enter MORTIMER ; he signs to KENNEDY, who withdraws :
his whole demeanour is wild and reckless.*

KENNEDY.

Oh, sir, here 's goodly work !

MORTIMER.

I heard it all.

[*Exit KENNEDY.*

Thine is the triumph ! in the dust she grovell'd
Before thy scathing scorn—thine is the victory !
Thou art the queen—the trembling traitor, she.
Thy lovely valour hath inflamed my soul.

I worship thee ! yea, a divinity
Art thou to my adoring eyes !

MARY.

You spake

With the Earl of Leicester ? to his hand deliver'd
My ring—my letter ? Good sir, answer me.

MORTIMER.

How thy bright dazzling wrath flash'd round thy beauty !
Thou art the fairest woman of the whole earth !

MARY.

Nay, I beseech you satisfy my doubts.
What said Lord Leicester ?—what have I to hope ?

MORTIMER.

Who ? he ?—the miserable dastard !—he ?
Hope nought from him—despise him and forget him.

MARY.

What say you !

MORTIMER.

He deliver—he possess thee !
Why let him ! but for life and death with me
Must he struggle first.

MARY.

Then you gave him my ring ?
My letter ?—all is over.

MORTIMER.

He would live,—
The coward loves his life ; who rescues thee
And calls thee his, must have the heart to die.

MARY.

He will not venture for me ?

MORTIMER.

Think not on him !

What can he do another may not dare ?
Alone I'll save thee—I—

MARY.

What is 't you say ?

MORTIMER.

Cheat not thyself with idle hopes and dreams ;
To-day it stands no more with thee as yesterday.
When the queen parted hence, and your fierce conference
Ended, the end of all was come for thee.
All 's over—every gate of mercy barr'd :
But deeds may yet avail,—daring prevail ;
Who may win all may fairly venture all ;
Thou shalt be free before to-morrow's dawn.

MARY.

To-night !—this very night !—to-night !

MORTIMER.

Give heed

To what we have done : within a secret chapel
I have assembled those who've sworn to save thee.
A priest took off its burthen from each soul ;
For our past sins we have had absolution,
And for all those this enterprise may cost us ;
The holy sacrament have we received,
And we are ready for the path of death.

MARY.

Terrible preparation !

MORTIMER.

This midnight

We shall possess the castle—of whose keys
I am already master ; they who watch thee
Shall sleep once and for ever ; from thy chamber
Myself will bear thee ; and that no tongue may tell
What any eye beheld, no living soul
Shall witness to the morrow of that night.

MARY.

And Drury—Paulet—my stern prison-keepers ?
Think you they will not be beforehand with you ?

MORTIMER.

They'll be the first to fall beneath my dagger.

MARY.

O Heavens, your uncle !

MORTIMER.

I will murder him.

MARY.

Oh, bloody horror !

MORTIMER.

I have absolution

Beforehand for all deeds ; the worst of horrors

No more appals me.

MARY.

What a savage frenzy !

MORTIMER.

If the lot to stab Elizabeth falls to me,

I'll do it ; I have sworn it on the host.

MARY.

Never for me shall flow such streams of blood !

MORTIMER.

Whose blood, whose life is anything to me,

Weigh'd with thy life, thy love ? Nay, let the earth

Lurch from its moorings, and a second deluge

Sweep all things breathing back into one chaos,

Ere I forego my purpose ! ere I lose thee

Let universal doom seize the whole world !

MARY.

Merciful Heaven ! what words and what a look—
Terror and shame creep like a palsy o'er me.

MORTIMER.

Life's but a moment, death is but another.
Let me be dragg'd to Tyburn, limb from limb
Let their hot pincers tear me,—what care I ?
So first I may but clasp thee—

MARY.

Traitor—back !

MORTIMER.

Upon thy breast—from thy love-breathing lips—

MARY.

In the name of God—release me—let me go !

MORTIMER.

Nay, he is mad who clutches not the bliss
Fate gives into his grasp. I'll set thee free ;
And if it cost a thousand lives, I'll free thee.
I've sworn it, and I'll do it ; but as God lives
If I rescue thee I will possess thee too.

MARY.

All holy saints and angels save—defend me !
Terrible destiny ! how am I flung

From one abyss to another ! Was I born
To inspire nought but frenzy ? Are hate and love
Banded alike against me ? Sir, have mercy—

MORTIMER.

Yea, fiercely as men hate, do I love thee !
They'll murder thee, with the sharp shearing axe
They'll sever that delicate throat so dazzling white ;
Oh, give thou to the god of joy—to love—
What bloody hate will claim for sacrifice !
With thy warm beauty—thine no more, but death's—
Bless, while thou canst, the slave that worships thee :
With the shining threads of thy golden, glossy hair,
Bind thou in everlasting chains my soul.

MARY.

Must I hear this, and bear it ! Sir, my misery
Should make me sacred to you ; my great misery,
If not my royal blood, should you respect.

MORTIMER.

The crown is fallen from thy brow ; no majesty
Of earthly pow'r enshrines thee now ; yet speak
One royal bidding more, and call me *thine*—
Thy servant—thy preserver ! Nought remains to thee
But thy sweet beauty's might of loveliness,
That bids me dare and venture all things for it—
That drives me willingly to the foot of the block

MARY.

Who shall deliver me from my deliverer?

MORTIMER.

A desperate service claims a desperate meed,
Else wherefore doth the hero spill his blood?
To live is not the highest joy of life,
Yet is he mad that gives his life for nothing.
Before I die I'll sleep upon thy heart—

MARY.

I must call out for help against this man—
My only friend!

MORTIMER.

Thou art not cold and hard;
The world has never held thee for unyielding.
The Italian Rizzio didst thou lift to heaven,
And that dark Bothwell clasp'd thee in his arms.

MARY.

Audacious slave!

MORTIMER.

He was thy tyrant; fear
Ev'n more than love did yield thee up to him;
Then, if by terror thou mayst yet be won,
By the God of heaven and hell—

MARY.

Peace, madman, peace!

MORTIMER.

Before me shalt thou tremble—

KENNEDY (*rushing in*).

They come ! they come !

They are at hand—arm'd men ; the park is full of
them !

MORTIMER.

Oh, fear not ; I'll defend thee.

MARY.

Save me, Hannah !

Save me from him ! Oh, miserable, whither

Shall I turn for refuge—seek for shelter ?

Insult and violence here, and yonder death.

[*She faints. HANNAH carries her out. PAULET and
DRURY rush in. Armed men cross the stage hastily.*

PAULET.

Close all the gates, and pull the drawbridge up !

MORTIMER.

Why, how now, uncle !

PAULET.

Where is the murderess ?

Hence with her, down to the deepest dungeon vault.

MORTIMER.

Speak—say—what has befallen ?

PAULET.

The queen ! the queen !
Accursed blow—devilish design ! the queen !

MORTIMER.

The queen ! which queen ?

PAULET.

England's Elizabeth ;
She has been murder'd on the road to London !
[*He rushes out.*]

MORTIMER.

Am I gone mad ?—came there not even now
One by me crying out ' The queen is murder'd ?'
Nay, but I dream ; a sudden fever fit
Brings that as palpable truth before my senses,
With which the swarming thoughts of my soul are full.
Who comes ?—O'Kelly ; his aspect's full of terror.

[*Enter O'KELLY.*]

O'KELLY.

Fly, Mortimer, fly ! All's lost !

MORTIMER.

What's lost ?

O'KELLY.

Be brief

In questioning, and think of present means of flight.

MORTIMER.

Speak, man.

O'KELLY.

That madman Savage struck the blow.

MORTIMER.

Then it is true?

O'KELLY.

True, true, and therefore fly.

MORTIMER.

She's dead! and Mary mounts the throne of England!

O'KELLY.

Dead! who has said so?

MORTIMER.

Thou thyself, this instant.

O'KELLY.

She lives; and thou, and I, and all of us
Are dead!

MORTIMER.

She lives!

O'KELLY.

Th' accurs'd knife glanced aside,
And Shrewsbury seized it from the wretch's hand.

MORTIMER.

She lives !

O' KELLY.

To doom us to ten thousand tortures !
Come, come,—the park's already guarded round.

MORTIMER.

Who did this goodly work ?

O' KELLY.

The Barnabite

From Toulon ; he that was with us in the chapel,
And lost in thought sat listening, while the priest
Read out the anathema, wherewith the pope
Had excommunicated England's queen.
He thought to find a readier, shorter way,
With one bold blow to free the Church from thrall,
Or seize the crown of martyrdom himself ;
To the priest alone he utter'd his design,
Which on the London road he meant t' accomplish.

MORTIMER (*after a long pause*).

Oh, thou art hunted by a pitiless fate,
Thou hapless one !—now must thou die indeed ;
For thy own angel has prepared thy ruin.

O'KELLY.

Say, whither wilt thou fly? To Scotland I;
To the heather hills and black pine woods for refuge.

MORTIMER.

Fly, and may God be with thee in thy flight!
I stay—something may yet be tried to save her,
If not, I can lie down and die upon her bier.

[*Exeunt.*]

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT IV.

SCENE 1.

A room in the Palace, London. Enter, meeting, COUNT D'AUBESPINE, KENT, and LEICESTER.

D'AUBESPINE.

How fares her gracious majesty? My lords,
You see me fill'd with terror and dismay.
How fell this out? What! in the very midst
Of her loving subjects!

LEICESTER.

Ay, sir, but it fell out
Through a subject of your king's. The ruffian's French.

D'AUBESPINE.

Some wretched madman—

KENT.

No, my lord, no madman;
But a papist.

[*Enter BURLEIGH, speaking to DAVISON.*

BURLEIGH.

Let the sentence be forthwith
Produced; the seal appended. When 't is ready,

Let it be brought for the queen's signature.
Go—lose no time.

DAVISON.

It shall be done, my lord.

[*Exit* DAVISON.]

D'AUBESPINE (*going towards* BURLEIGH).

My lord, with the truest heart of loyal friendship,
I share the joy of your whole land ; and praise
The Heavens that have parried the foul blow
And saved that sacred head.

BURLEIGH.

We praise Heaven, sir,
That it has brought our treacherous foes to shame.

D'AUBESPINE.

God's curse alight upon the caitiff murderer !

BURLEIGH.

Yea, on the murderer and the deviser too.

D'AUBESPINE.

My Lord High Marshal, may I be bold to crave
That you 'll conduct me to her majesty ?
That at her royal feet I lay my duty,
And my lord and master's hearty gratulations.

BURLEIGH.

Oh, my good lord, you may spare yourself the pains.

D'AUBESPINE.

Sir, I do know the privilege of my duty.

BURLEIGH.

It shall be well, that, at your speediest,
You carry it out of England.

D'AUBESPINE.

How shall I

Understand you, sir?

BURLEIGH.

Briefly, my lord. Your office
Shields you to-day; to-day you are inviolate,
For your high office's sake, but not to-morrow.

D'AUBESPINE.

The right of a French ambassador, my lord—

BURLEIGH.

Will not excuse high treason, sir.

KENT AND LEICESTER.

How now!

D'AUBESPINE.

Lord Burleigh, have a care—

BURLEIGH.

Count d'Aubespine, a pass,
Sign'd by your hand, was found upon the murderer.

KENT.

Is 't possible!

D'AUBESPINE.

That may be true—what then?
I do not know the hearts and thoughts of those
For whom I daily sign a hundred passes.

BURLEIGH.

The villain ate at your house.

D'AUBESPINE.

My house is open—

BURLEIGH.

To all the enemies of England.

D'AUBESPINE.

I demand

Enquiry into this matter.

BURLEIGH.

Sir, believe me

'T were best you let it pass.

D'AUBESPINE.

Not so ; in me

The faith of my royal master is attainted ;
This scarce will solder our new ties of amity.

BURLEIGH.

The queen, sir, hath already cast them from her ;
England will not ally herself with France.
My Lord of Kent, to you it now belongs
Safe convoy to afford Count d'Aubespine.
The furious mob have storm'd his house, and found
An arsenal of weapons stored therein.
Their threats are loud ; and should he show himself
He'll scarce 'scape outrage. You must answer for him.

D'AUBESPINE.

I shall depart, lords, from your lawless land,
Where mobs tread under foot the rights of kings,
And the people make a jest of the prince's plight.
But be ye sure of this, my king will have
A bloody reckoning for this contumely.

BURLEIGH.

Let him come for it, sir,—it shall not fail him.

[*Exeunt* KENT and D'AUBESPINE.]

LEICESTER.

Thus with one hand you violently tear
The bond, that with the other you'd scarce knit up

So busily. Your pains, my lord, are hardly
Worth England's thanks.

BURLEIGH.

My purpose, sir, was good ;
It fares not ill with those who dare say that.

LEICESTER.

Now must we look for the mysterious bearing
Of Cecil, hunting out conspiracies ;
Now shall your lordship reap a good fat harvest
Of the kind you love. A desperate deed is done,
And darkness mantles up the doer. Now
Shall we have a bloodier than Spain's Inquisition ;
And words, and looks, and thoughts be sternly dragg'd
To your tribunal ; for indeed you are
A mighty man ! an Atlas ! on whose shoulders
All England sits.

BURLEIGH.

And yet, I freely own you
My master, my good lord ; for such a victory
As that your cunning yesterday achieved
Ne'er graced my best endeavour.

LEICESTER.

What means that ?

BURLEIGH.

Indeed 't was politic, behind my back,
To coax and wheedle, till to Fotheringay
You lured the queen, our ever-honour'd mistress—

LEICESTER.

Or to your face had been the same to me.

BURLEIGH.

The gracious queen you led to Fotheringay—
Yet, no, indeed—she graciously led you.

LEICESTER.

Sir, I suppose your riddle has some meaning?

BURLEIGH.

A proper part, too, was she made to play.
A noble triumph had you there prepared for her.
Good queen! that ever such a shameless cheat
Should have been practised on her easiness!
Therefore were gentleness and pity commendable,
And policy fit but to wait on them.
Therefore was Mary Stuart so weak a foe;
Alack! she was but worthy of contempt,
Not the high honour of a mortal sentence.
'T was a good plot, and wrought to a good point,
Only so fine and sharp that the point broke.
That was a pity!

LEICESTER.

Follow me to the queen !
Before her will I answer you, false lord.

BURLEIGH.

Nay, I will meet you there, and look to 't well,
Your charm of ready speech fail you not then ;
You 'll find some need for it, believe me.

[*Exit* BURLEIGH.]

LEICESTER.

I 'm betray'd—

Discover'd ; he has hit upon my track.
Accursed spy ! what if he 've proof against me ?
If once the queen shall know the secret bond
'Twixt me and Mary Stuart !—hell, what a ruin
Yawns at my feet ! how shall she then remember
The luckless counsel that to Fotheringay
Led her ? Why, what a villain, what a slave
Of guilt and treachery, shall she then esteem me ?
The mock, the scorn, the sport of her hated rival
Has she been made through me. Oh, never, never,
Can that be cancell'd ; all will seem to have been
Prepared, made ready beforehand, for that scene.
The black and bitter course of their conference,
The poison'd taunts of her triumphant victim,
Yea, ev'n the murderous stroke that follow'd them,
All, all, shall I be held th' inventor of—

Nothing can save me from perdition—nothing.
How now! who comes?

[*Enter MORTIMER.*

MORTIMER.

You are the man I seek—

Are we alone?

LEICESTER.

Hence, wretch! what seek'st thou here?

MORTIMER.

We are discover'd—they are on our track—
On yours too—therefore save yourself!

LEICESTER.

Avaunt!

Begone!

MORTIMER.

The secret meetings at Count d'Aubespine's
Are known of.

LEICESTER.

What is it to me? wilt leave me?

MORTIMER.

And he, the murderer, was one of the band.

LEICESTER.

Look to 't, and answer it—'t is none of mine.
Villain! what tell'st thou me of thy perilous case,
Keep thy accursed secrets to thyself!

MORTIMER.

This touches you, my lord—

LEICESTER.

Get thee to hell !

Nor hang like an unlaid ghost about my path.

Get hence ! I know thee not—I hold no fellowship
With stabbers.

MORTIMER.

Listen—I warn you—listen yet ;
Your secret steps are known and counted—

LEICESTER.

Ha !

MORTIMER.

To Fotheringay sped the Lord High Treasurer
Soon as the accursed blow had fail'd ; the chamber
Of the queen was diligently search'd, and there
Was found—

LEICESTER.

What—what ?

MORTIMER.

A yet unfinish'd letter
From her to you.

LEICESTER.

Oh, fatal woman !

MORTIMER.

Wherein

She doth beseech you to hold faith with her,
Renews the promise of her hand to you,
Reminds you of her picture that you have—

LEICESTER.

Death and damnation !

MORTIMER.

Burleigh has the letter.

LEICESTER.

Ruin has caught me !

MORTIMER.

Yet is this moment yours.

Be once beforehand with the fate that threatens you.
Save her, and save yourself; swear, swear all down;
Bethink you of all pleas, make dangers serve you.
I can no more—our weapons are all scatter'd,
Our band dispersed—to Scotland I, to raise
Another host of friends. Work you the while,
See what your favour and bold front can do.

LEICESTER.

Yea, you say well. I will—what ho, there, officer !

[Enter an OFFICER OF THE QUEEN'S GUARD.]

Arrest that traitor ! and in strict ward keep him—

A vile conspiracy have I lighted on,
The news of which I straight bear to the queen.

[*Exit* LEICESTER.]

MORTIMER.

Dastardly traitor ! yet am I rightly served
Who laid a noble trust on such a wretch ;
He sets his foot upon my neck, to spring,
And my dead body bridges o'er his ruin.
So save thyself, most miserable man !
My lips shall not be open'd to betray thee ;
Not ev'n in death would I have thee for fellow,
And life is the sole good of such as thou.

[*To the Guards, who approach him.*

What wouldst thou, thou poor slave of tyranny ?
I am not thine, but free.

[*He draws a dagger.*

OFFICER.

Ha ! seize him ;
He 's arm'd ! he hath a dagger !

MORTIMER.

Free ! and freely
In this my latest hour shall my soul speak.
My curse upon ye all ! who your God and queen
Alike deny ; who to the heavenly
And the earthly Mary traitors are alike ;
Who to this bastard queen your souls have sold—

OFFICER.

Hence with the ribald railer ! hence with him.

MORTIMER.

Beloved, ah, beloved ! I may not save thee,
But love's last counsel in my death I leave thee ;
Oh, holy Queen of Heaven receive me ! pray for me !
[*He stabs himself.*]

SCENE 2.

The Queen's chamber. Enter ELIZABETH, followed by BURLEIGH; she holds a letter in her hand.

ELIZABETH.

What, fool'd to such a height ! what, such a game
To play with me ! with *me* ! in treacherous triumph
To lead me as a show for his wanton's mirth !
Did any woman e'er endure such outrage ?

BURLEIGH.

Yet can I not conceive what art, what might,
What magic he employ'd, the keener sense
Of my gracious mistress so to hoodwink.

ELIZABETH.

Silence !

I burst with rage and shame ! his tool—his puppet !
I went to humble her, and was myself
The football of her scorn.

BURLEIGH.

Now may your majesty
Perceive, the counsel that I gave was wholesome.

ELIZABETH.

Yea, yea, I smart right sorely for not trusting it ;
For turning from your wise and faithful teaching.
Yet how could I doubt him ? how in the vows
Of truest love and service spy out snares ?
Whom shall I dare to trust when Leicester's false ?
He that I 've made greater than the greatest here ;
That nearest to my heart and person stood ;
Whom I have taught this court to look upon
As its lord and prince—in all but name a king.

BURLEIGH.

And he the while repaid you, by betraying
Your love and trust for this fair Queen of Scots.

ELIZABETH.

She shall pay it with her blood ! fair Queen of Scots !
Is the sentence ready ?

BURLEIGH.

Ay, so please you, madam.

ELIZABETH.

She shall die, and he shall see it ; and die himself
After ; from out my breast I 've turn'd him forth,

And the love I bore him ; fury hath fill'd his place.
As high as his pow'r and favour were, so deep
Shall be his downfall and disgrace ; he shall be
A fearful token of my wrath henceforth,
As hitherto the object of my weakness.
To the Tower with him ! I will name the peers
Who presently shall judge him. I give him over
To the law's utmost rigour.

BURLEIGH.]

Oh, doubt not, madam,
That he will seek to clear himself—

ELIZABETH.

How ? how ?

Doth not this letter impeach and sentence him ?
This treason blinds one in the eyes. Here, read it !

BURLEIGH.

But you are mild and merciful ; and he
Hath spells in his looks, and witchcraft in his words.

ELIZABETH.

I will not see him ! never, never again !
Have you, my lord, given order when he comes
He shall be denied our presence ?

BURLEIGH.

Madam, I have.

A PAGE (*announcing*).

The Earl of Leicester !

ELIZABETH.

Insolent villain ! what ?

Bid him pack ; we will not see him, tell him so ;

Bid him get hence.

PAGE.

So please your gracious majesty,

I dare not answer so the earl, for he

Would not believe me.

ELIZABETH.

Is it come to this ?

I've made this man so big, that my own servant

Cannot see me for him.

BURLEIGH.

Dost hear, the queen

Forbids the earl's approach ?

ELIZABETH.

And yet, if 't were so—

If he could clear himself—Burleigh, how think you ?

Is it impossible but this might be

An evil snare of the Scottish woman yonder,

To make me banish the truest friend I have ?

She is a cunning plotter and contriver,

And it may be that she hath writ all this
To sow distraction in my mind, and pluck
His ruin on his head, because he hates her.
It may be ?

BURLEIGH.

Gracious madam, it might be, but yet —

[LEICESTER *throws open the door and
enters haughtily.*

LEICESTER.

Let me behold that brave bold man that dares
Forbid me the presence of my sov'reign lady.

ELIZABETH.

Audacious !

LEICESTER.

What, not see me ! send me hence !
Shall Burleigh stand where I am not admitted ?

BURLEIGH,

You are overdaring, sir, to rush in thus,
Forbid !

LEICESTER.

You are overdaring, sir, to speak
Until you're bid. Forbid—forbid—forsooth !
Who in this court bids or forbids me ? who
But thou, dear mistress, from whose lips alone—

ELIZABETH.

Out of my sight, thou poisonous traitor !

LEICESTER.

No !

Not thou, dear mistress, speakest to thy servant ;
This lord here prompts thy angry words—in vain ;
To thee, dear mistress, I appeal against him ;
To him thou hast lent thine ear—to me
Deny it not, oh sovereign queen of my soul !

ELIZABETH.

Speak, villain ! and heap up thy treachery
With perjury. Deny his charge !

LEICESTER.

But, first,

Before I speak, bid him begone. My lord,
What to my queen I come to say shall have
No ear but hers. Go—

ELIZABETH.

Stay, I command you !

LEICESTER.

What makes a third 'twixt thee and me, dear mistress ;
We pray not Heaven for standers by to hear.
The right and privilege of my place I claim,
The right and privilege of thy counsellors,
And say again, this listening lord shall hence.

ELIZABETH.

Why thy bold speech becomes thy towering treason.

LEICESTER.

It becomes one made fortunate by thy favour,
And who, how small soe'er himself, is lifted
By that alone 'bove him and all the world.
Thy grace hath given me all the pride I have,
And what thy grace hath given my life shall keep;
And so by Heaven this man shall hence, nor dare
To stand another moment 'twixt us twain.

ELIZABETH.

He thinks to talk himself again into favour.

LEICESTER.

No, I leave talking to whose trade it is;
Yet to thy heart will I speak. What I have done,
Strong in thy gracious favour, I'll make good
And justify; for in thy bosom sits
The judge whose sentence I acknowledge.

ELIZABETH.

Traitor!

I have no thought but cries out guilty on thee—
Show him that letter.

BURLEIGH.

Here, my lord.

LEICESTER.

The hand

Is Mary Stuart's—

ELIZABETH.

Stop thy mouth with that !

LEICESTER.

I own this shows against me ; yet well I hope,
The trial of my faith stands not on shows.

ELIZABETH.

Come, then, with that in thy hand, swear traitor,
That thou wast not in secret league with her,
Ne'er hadst her picture, never swor'st to free her.

LEICESTER.

Why, it were easy, madam, were I guilty,
To thrust this witness of my foes aside ;
But as my heart is free, I do not fear
To own (how strange soe'er it seem) that she
Hath writ the truth.

ELIZABETH.

Indeed ! oh, hath she so !

BURLEIGH.

Out of his own mouth he's condemn'd.

ELIZABETH.

Hence with him

To the Tower ! thou traitorous villain !

LEICESTER.

I am none.

That I have held this thing a secret from you,
Therein, perchance, I 've sinn'd ; yet as the stake
Was to lure on your rival to her ruin,
I thought close counsel best till the game was won.

ELIZABETH.

Oh, miserable juggler !

BURLEIGH.

How, my lord !

LEICESTER.

A bold cast have I ventured, and well know
Leicester alone in all this land durst tempt it ;
The world has not to learn to-day, the hatred
I bear to Mary Stuart ; the rank I hold,
And the queen's trust in me, challenge some faith,
And something weigh 'gainst the doubt that questions
me ;

And 't was no less than that man's duty she
Had with her favour glorified, to find
A way none other dared have tried to serve her.

BURLEIGH.

Why was so good a work a mystery ?

LEICESTER.

My lord, we know it is your wont to preface
Your doing with much saying ; 't is not mine.
You sound the trumpet still to your own deeds,
And ring your bell before you—that 's your fashion ;
I act before I speak.

BURLEIGH.

I think, indeed,
Your speaking now is sore against your will.

LEICESTER.

With right good will you 've spoken your great doings ;
Wonderful judgment ! the queen, our mistress' safety,
The treason of her foes, all have you seen,
And done, and known, for nothing sure outruns,
Or lurks behind, your lynx-eyed vigilance.
Yet, despite thee, poor boasting gentleman,
This day had Mary Stuart been set free,
Had not I hinder'd it.

BURLEIGH.

You !

LEICESTER.

I, my lord.
The queen was pleased to trust one Mortimer ;

To whom her secret counsels she laid bare ;
And went indeed so far, as to beg of him
A bloody piece of service ; to the which
His uncle, as you will remember, sir,
Could not be brought or bribed—is not this so ?
Say ?

BURLEIGH.

If it were, 't is scarce your business, sir.

LEICESTER.

But it *is* so. Now then, my lord ; where were
Your thousand eyes, that ne'er a one of them
Spied out this Mortimer for a pestilent traitor ?
A raging papist, instrument of the Guise,
And sold slave to the Queen of Scots ? the chief
Of those who were all sworn to set her free,
And murder our gracious mistress ?

ELIZABETH.

Mortimer !

LEICESTER.

Through him were her overtures first made to me ;
And so I learnt to know him what he was.
To-day—this very hour—he had been borne
To prison—for within this hour himself
Did liberally unfold their purposes to me.
I had him seized ; but in the desperate rage

Of seeing his good work fall all to pieces,
And himself unmask'd, he madly slew himself.

ELIZABETH.

I'm lost in wonder!—he—that Mortimer—

LEICESTER.

For mine own part, I heartily could wish
He had not made away with himself. His witness,
Had he lived, should have clear'd me to the utmost;
Therefore indeed I bade them guard him straitly.
I would have had him sifted through and through
By the most searching process of the law,
So had mine innocence been made apparent.

BURLEIGH.

How did you say, my lord—he slew himself?
Or he was slain by you?

LEICESTER.

Oh, base suggestion!

Let the officer of the watch be call'd, to show
I gave him up.

[Goes to the door and calls.]

Within there!

[Enter OFFICER OF THE QUEEN'S GUARD.]

To her majesty
Relate the process of that Mortimer's death.

OFFICER.

Being on guard, I stood in the anteroom,
When the Earl of Leicester, flinging wide the doors,
Bade me arrest, as guilty of high treason,
The man he spoke with—Mortimer. We did so;
But ere we could secure him or prevent it,
He drew his dagger, and in a desperate frenzy,
Shrieking out curses 'gainst the queen and state,
He stabb'd himself, and died there where he fell.

LEICESTER.

Enough—you may withdraw; the queen is satisfied.

[*Exit* OFFICER.]

ELIZABETH.

What an abyss of villainous treachery!

LEICESTER.

Now, who did save thee, guard thee, and defend thee?
Did Burleigh see the peril all about thee,
And turn away its hand ere it had clutch'd thee?
Thy faithful Leicester was thy guardian angel.

BURLEIGH.

This Mortimer kill'd himself in the nick of time
For you, my lord—a most convenient caitiff.

ELIZABETH.

I know not what to say, for I believe thee—
And yet believe thee not. I think thee guilty—

And then I think it not. Pernicious woman!
Who in this web has tangled all my mind!

LEICESTER.

Now must she die; now for her death myself
Do give my voice. Long did I counsel, madam,
That you should leave unsign'd the fatal warrant,
At least until again some arm was raised
In her behalf against you. It has befallen;
And now I hold her sentence be fulfill'd.

BURLEIGH.

You counsel it—you?

LEICESTER.

Even to the last
I seized on the faintest shadow of excuse,
That from this dire extremity might save
The heart of our good mistress; but I see
Her precious safety needs this bloody sacrifice;
And I do hope, and pray, yea, and advise,
That judgment be forthwith made execution.

BURLEIGH.

His lordship is so earnest in this matter,
That I well hope your gracious majesty
Will to no other but himself commit
The bearing of her doom to Mary Stuart.

LEICESTER.

Who—I? What is 't you say?

BURLEIGH.

You, my good lord.

Nor could a readier means be furnish'd you
To clear the doubts that even now o'ershow'd
The sunlight of your truth, than that you should
Lead her to death whom you have stood accused
Of loving more than might beseem your loyalty.

ELIZABETH.

'Tis a good counsel; and we will it so.

LEICESTER.

Methinks my rank might from this gloomy office
Have well absolved me; 'tis a service fits
A thousand ways Lord Burleigh more than me;
Who to the queen stands in such honour'd nearness,
So bloody and so black a task beseems not.
Yet am I nothing slow to show my zeal,
And serve my dearest mistress even thus.
I will not claim exemption even from this,
And from your hand accept the hateful duty.

ELIZABETH.

Burleigh, or Kent, shall share it with you; see
That all things be made ready for the end.

[*Exit* BURLEIGH.]

[*Tumult without. Enter hurriedly the EARL OF KENT.*

How now, my lord of Kent? what new distraction
Upheaves the city? what's the matter now?

KENT.

Madam, the people gather round the palace,
Clamouring to see your highness.

ELIZABETH.

Wherefore?

KENT.

Fear has possess'd all London of your death;
A thousand evil rumours are abroad
That your life is threaten'd; that fee'd murderers,
Sent by the pope, walk 'mong your faithful subjects.
The cry goes through the streets that you were stabb'd;
That the papists are all sworn together—banded—
The Scottish woman to set free by force,
And make her queen; so goes the common voice.
The citizens are in uproar, and they clamour
For the head of Mary Stuart; nor will
A lesser offering appease their rage.

ELIZABETH.

How! shall we be compell'd to what we will not?

KENT.

They have resolved not to disperse themselves
Till they have word the sentence has been sign'd.

[*Re-enter BURLEIGH and DAVISON with the sentence.*

ELIZABETH.

Now, sir—what 's this?

DAVISON.

Your majesty commanded—

ELIZABETH (*taking the paper*).

What is it? O God!

BURLEIGH.

Hear you the people's voice?

Madam, that is the voice of God.

ELIZABETH.

My lords—

My lords—I am beyond all measure troubled!

Who shall assure me that I hear indeed

The voice of my people and the voice of God!

I tell you, sirs, I fear—yea, I do fear—

If I obey this voice that clamours to me,

Another voice some other day to hear;

Nay, or perchance this same, this very same,

That now doth loudly urge me to the deed,

When the deed 's done as loudly shall condemn it.

[*Enter SHREWSBURY.*

SHREWSBURY.

Madam, they drag you to a desperate pass,

Where you shall neither back nor forward go

With safety. Oh, be stedfast, and stand firm !

[*Seeing* DAVISON.

Or—is it done ? is it irrevocable ?

The fatal document I see he holds ;

But it has not been laid before the eyes

Of my gracious mistress yet ?

ELIZABETH.

O Shrewsbury !

Where shall I turn for counsel ? They compel me—

SHREWSBURY.

Compel you, madam ! who may dare compel you ?

Are you not sovereign here ? Is not your will

Paramount law ? Speak, and command to silence

Each insolent voice, that dares make itself heard

To urge your deed, or sway your royal will.

A blind and furious fear drives on the people ;

Yourself are not yourself ; this tumult scares

Even your spirit ; this is no time to judge !

BURLEIGH.

Judgment is not the question now, my lord ;

Judgment is pass'd long since ; 't is execution

Of judgment now we seek.

KENT (*looking from the window*).

The crowd comes gathering ;

A tide it seems, rolling its ridges in ;

I know not how this surge shall be kept back.

ELIZABETH (*to SHREWSBURY*).

You see how I am driven.

SHREWSBURY.

Nay, but delay

Is all I ask ; upon this stroke of the pen
Hang the future peace and fortune of your reign,
Years have not brought you to determine on it ;
Shall a moment's storm and outcry counsel you ?
A short delay—gather your stedfast purpose,
And wait an hour of quiet.

BURLEIGH.

Wait—loiter—linger—

Till the whole realm is red-hot with sedition ;
Till at length your enemy strikes true at last.
Three times has God from her hand deliver'd you,
To-day it had well nigh reach'd you. Once again
To hope such miracle is to tempt Heaven.

SHREWSBURY.

That God who with his wonder-working hand
Hath four times led you safe beside your doom,
And who to this old arm to-day gave pow'r
To beat your murderer down, deserves your trust.
I will not now invoke the voice of justice ;
With this tempest in your ears you could not hear it.
But hear you this : before this living woman

You quail ; fear not the living, but the dead.
Fear her beheaded, bloody corpse ; for that
Shall from the block spring up, and up and down,
Through the whole land shall run, scaring your
kingdom

Like an avenging ghost—a devil of discord—
And all your people's hearts shall she turn from you.
They hate her now, because they've learnt to fear her,
But when they fear her not, they will avenge her.
No more the living enemy of their faith,
But the murder'd kinswoman of their kings,
The pitiful sacrifice of hate and envy,
Will they behold in her, and pity her,
And quickly will you feel their alter'd mood.
Ride then through London, after execution
Is done on her ; 'stead of the loyal crowds
That still have clamour'd welcome round your way,
Another England, and another people,
Then will you find, I trow ; for then no more
Shall the victorious righteousness surround you
That conquer'd for you all men's hearts ; but fear,
Terror, th' accursed guard of tyranny,
Shall shuddering go before you and behind,
And make your city's streets a wilderness.
You will have struck a fatal blow indeed ;
For who shall dare feel safe when that anointed
And crowned head has fallen ?

ELIZABETH.

Shrewsbury,

This day thou 'st saved my life, the murderer's steel
Hast thou this day turn'd from me ; by Heaven ! I would
He had struck home, and no man hinder'd him !
All strife were ended, every doubt at rest,
And I were laid in peace in my grave. I swear,
Living and reigning are a bitter burthen,
And I would well I were well eased of both.
Must one queen fall that the other may stand fast ?
Yea, yea, it must be so ; I know it ; but wherefore,
In Heaven's name, should not ourselves strike under,
And give the battle up, and let her reign ?
Let the people choose, for I will give them back
My royalty, and they shall freely lend it
To whom they will. God is my witness, lords !
Not for myself, but for my people's welfare,
Have I cared my whole life long ; natheless, perchance,
They hope from this fair, flattering Queen of Scots,
This younger woman, days more prosperous.
So be it ! from my throne I will come down
Right readily, and turn me back to Woodstock,
To the abode of peace where sped my youth ;
There, far from the evil strife of power, I found
Greatness within myself. 'T is true, by God !
I am not fit to rule ; a ruler's heart
Should be of iron, mine is woman weak.
Hitherto happily I 've ruled this land ;

For to make happy is an easy task ;
Now comes this first stern call of royal duty,
And I confess myself unfit to reign.

BURLEIGH.

By Heaven ! when such a word from the queen's lips
Falls, let my longer silence be held treason—
Treason to duty, treason to England—longer
To hold my peace. If, madam, as you say,
And as we all believe, you love indeed
Your people better than yourself, now show it !
Turn not away to the haven of your peace,
And give the kingdom up to storm and tempest.
Think of our faith ; with Mary Stuart comes
The ancient superstition back again.
Again the monk shall lord it o'er the land,
And, sent by Rome, audacious legates come
To bar our church doors up, and, from their throne,
Curse down our kings. Think of the precious souls
Of those you rule ; ev'n as you now determine,
So are they lost or saved. This is no time
For weakly woman's pity ; your first duty
Is to your people. Shrewsbury to-day
Has saved your highness' life ; for me remains
A task more glorious yet, 't is to save England.

ELIZABETH.

Let me be left alone ; in this great matter
I find no help nor comfort in your counsels ;

Before the Highest Judge I will debate
This business with my soul. He will enlighten me,
And by His will alone will I shape mine.
Leave us, my lords.

[To DAVISON.

You, sir, remain at hand.

[*Exeunt all but ELIZABETH and DAVISON,
who stands at a distance.*

ELIZABETH.

Oh, slavery of kings! oh, curse of power!
Detested tyranny of the popular will!
How sick at heart with weariness I am
Of flattering this gross god that I despise!
When shall I sit in freedom on my throne?
When may I cease to beg opinion's cheer?
The 'Well done!' of the rabble rout to court?
To bow to this people, who, with juggler's tricks,
Must still be kept agape, and in good humour?
'Sdeath! he's no king who still is tied to observe
The will of the world, and set his every act
To whatsoever measure suits their mind.
Fool that I was, still to deal uprightly,
And all my life the free course of my will
To bridle with their liking! Now dare I not
Do this one deed of sov'reignty. I cannot
Move, for myself have tied my own hands up;
The pattern of my hitherto life condemns me;
And, for I've still been just, I still must be so.

Had I been bold and tyrannous like her,
My predecessor, bloody Spanish Mary,
Now might I spill this royal blood unblamed,
And none had dared to whisper. Not of my own
Free will chose I this narrow path of duty,
Nor willingly walk'd unswervingly therein.
All powerful necessity, that rules
The wild waves of the stormy sea, compels
The will of kings, and laid this virtue on me.
Hemm'd round with bitter foes, the people's favour
Alone upholds me on my dangerous seat;
Whilst to mine overthrow are sworn a thousand
Enemies from without and from within.
Upon my head the Roman priest has pour'd
The scorching curse of excommunication;
France, with a smiling Judas kiss betrays me;
And open threatening of huge armaments
The Spaniard brings against me on the sea.
So stand I here a weaponless, weak woman,
Fighting against a world! With royal virtues
Must I cloak o'er my thin and threadbare claim;
The flaw in my birthright, and the bitter slur
By my own father cast upon my blood,
I cannot hide—my rival's eager hate
Hath stript it naked to the world, and held it,
An everlasting blot, up to mine eyes.
Nay, but this fear shall end. Her head shall fall.
I will have peace, by God! I swear I will.

She is the fury of my life—a spectre
Whose shadow stands for ever in my sunlight.
Where I have sown a flowering joy to cheer me,
She, the accursed snake, crawls from beneath it.
My lover hath she stol'n from me—my bridegroom
Driven hence—each several plague and smart of my life
Calls itself Mary Stuart. She shall die!
And I will be as free as mountain air!
With what a deadly scorn she look'd upon me,
As though her eyes could fell me to the earth.
Impotent fool! I carry deadlier weapons,
That, touching thee, shall smite thee into nothing.
A bastard am I! Why, thou wretched woman,
'Tis only while thou liv'st that I am one—
The doubt that stains my royal scutcheon's wash'd
Clean from it with thy blood; for from the hour
That no more choice remains between us two,
I am the rightful queen of this land—thy death
To the whole world makes me legitimate.

[She signs the sentence rapidly, lets the pen fall from her hand, and withdraws from the table with an expression of terror: after a pause she rings: DAVISON comes forward.]

ELIZABETH.

Where are the lords?

DAVISON.

So please you, they are gone
To still the tumult of the raging people.

Soon as the Earl of Shrewsbury appear'd,
'Tis he!' exclaim'd at once an hundred voices,
'There he is! That is he who saved the queen!
The best and bravest man in England!' Then
Began the noble Talbot to address them,
And with such winning wisdom, powerful gentleness,
And cunning craft, convincingly he spoke,
That all grew still, and presently in peace
The well-contented multitude dispersed.

ELIZABETH.

Unstable-minded herd! that every breath
Hither and thither drives. Woe, woe to those
Who lean upon that reed! You may be gone, sir.
Stay—take this paper—to your hand I give it.

DAVISON.

Your majesty's signature—O Heaven, 'tis sign'd!

ELIZABETH.

'T was brought to me to sign, and I have sign'd it.
Well, and what then? A sheet of paper signifies
Nothing; a written name kills not.

DAVISON.

Your name,
Beneath this sheet of paper, signifies
No less than sudden death. Madam, it is
The thunderstroke that carries instant doom.

This paper doth command the Lords Commissioners
And sheriff with all speed to Fotheringay,
There to make known to the Queen of Scots her sentence,
And with to-morrow's dawn to execute it.
Here's no delay—she may be said to have lived
When I let go this paper.

ELIZABETH.

Even so.

God lays a great and weighty destiny
In your weak hand—pray to Him heartily,
That He may lend His wisdom to your mind.
I leave you to the doing of your duty.

DAVISON.

Nay, dread and gracious sovereign! leave me not
Till you make known your royal will to me;
Here must I dare no otherwise be wise
Than point by point to follow your command.
Hath your grace committed this to me, that I
Should to the fatal issue forward it?

ELIZABETH.

Be that according to your own discretion.

DAVISON.

To mine! to my discretion! God forbid!
Obedience is my very verge of duty.
Your servant, madam, dares not here be judge

The smallest oversight were a queen's murder—
A terrible and unredeemable crime.

Nay, grant me, I most humbly do implore you,
In this great matter to be nothing more
Than your blind and irresponsible instrument.
Speak, for the love of God! once, in plain words;
What is your will that I should do with this?

ELIZABETH.

Doth not its own name tell thee plain enough?

DAVISON.

You will, then, that this sentence be fulfill'd——

ELIZABETH.

Nay, but I said not so, and quake to think it!

DAVISON.

You will, then, that I yet delay to send it?

ELIZABETH.

At thy peril! see thou to the consequence!

DAVISON.

Merciful Heaven! what *is* your gracious will?

ELIZABETH.

My will! my will is with this damned thing
No more to be plagued!—my will is to have peace
And rest from this matter henceforth and for ever!

DAVISON.

It costs your highness but a single word ;
Speak, madam—say—what *shall* be done with it?

ELIZABETH.

I have already spoken ; weary me
No more, but get thee gone.

DAVISON.

Oh, royal lady,

What have you spoken ? you have spoken nothing.
Dread sovereign, may it please you—

ELIZABETH.

God confound thee !

DAVISON.

Have mercy on me ! but a few short months
Have I fill'd this office, nothing do I know
Of courtly speech, or the great use of royalty—
Simple and lowly hath my breeding been ;
Have mercy then, on your unworthy slave !
Grudge not, dread majesty ! to speak the word
That teaches me my duty and your will !

*[He approaches her in a beseeching attitude, she
turns her back on him ; he stands in despair,
and then suddenly exclaims,*

Take back this paper ! take it back again !
It burns like fire in my uncertain hand.
Lay not on me the burthen of your choice
To serve your highness in this fearful business !

ELIZABETH.

What prate ye there ! you know your office. Do it !

[*Exit the QUEEN. Enter BURLEIGH.*

DAVISON.

She goes—she leaves me without help or counsel,
Bewilder'd, with this sentence in my hand ;
What now to do ? Shall I deliver it,
Or keep it back ? Oh, welcome, noble lord !
You to this post of honour did advance me ;
Now set me free from it. I undertook it
Nought knowing of its perilous duties—let me
Go back to my former lowliness again,
For sure I do not fit a loftier place.

BURLEIGH.

How now, sir — what's the matter ? where's the
sentence ?

Did not the queen send for you ?

DAVISON.

In fearful wrath

She went hence, even now—help me—advise me—
Here is the sentence, sign'd.

BURLEIGH.

Sign'd ! give it, quick !

DAVISON.

Nay, but I dare not—

BURLEIGH.

How!

DAVISON.

Her majesty
Hath not yet clearly shown her will as touching it.

BURLEIGH.

Not clearly? She has signed it; give it me!

DAVISON.

Must I to execution put it—must I not?
What should I do?

BURLEIGH.

Why, with thy utmost speed
Have it fulfill'd, thou 'rt lost by this delay.

DAVISON.

By too rash speed am I lost too.

BURLEIGH.

Give it—give it!
Fool, thou art frightened from thy wits—to me
Give up the sentence! [*He seizes it and rushes out.*]

DAVISON.

Hold, for the love of God!
[*He rushes after him.*]

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V.

SCENE 1.

The same scene as during the First Act. HANNAH KENNEDY in deep mourning; her eyes are red with weeping, and her whole deportment indicating a deep but calm affliction, is busied sealing letters and packets. She occasionally interrupts herself to weep, and sometimes suspends her occupation, to pray. PAULET and DRURY also attired in black enter, followed by a number of servants carrying gold and silver vessels, mirrors, pictures, and other costly objects, and place them at the back of the stage. PAULET delivers to HANNAH a jewel casket, and a paper, indicating by a gesture, that the latter contains an inventory of the things collected together. At the sight of these HANNAH'S grief becomes more poignant; she sinks down overcome with sorrow, while the others silently withdraw. Enter MELVIL. KENNEDY, perceiving him, shrieks.

KENNEDY.

Melvil, 't is you! once more do I behold you.

MELVIL.

Yes, faithful Kennedy, we meet once more.

KENNEDY.

After this long and bitter separation—

MELVIL.

We are rewarded by this bitter meeting.

KENNEDY.

O God, then you are come—

MELVIL.

To take my last,
My everlasting farewell of my queen.

KENNEDY.

To-day at last—to-day, when she must die,
The sight of her faithful servants long denied,
Is now vouchsafed to her. O worthiest sir !
I will not ask how it has fared with you,
I dare not tell how it has fared with us.
Ah ! there will come an hour for that sad story.
O Melvil, that we e'er were born to see
The dreadful dawn of such a day as this !

MELVIL.

Let us not with vain tears weaken each other ;
Yea, I will weep to the latest hour I live ;
Never will I put off death's dismal livery,
Nor ever shall a smile brighten my face.
After to-day I 'll weep all days away,
But for to-day, I will not shed one tear ;
I will be stedfast—and be you so too,
I pray you ; and, howe'er the rest do bear them,
Let us, with faithful fortitude, support
Our mistress' steps, on the dark road to death.

KENNEDY.

Melvil, you are deceived if you believe
The queen doth need our help to perish nobly.
She holds a dauntless pattern to us all,
And Mary Stuart dies a royal heroine.

MELVIL.

How did she bear the tidings of her doom ?
'Tis said she barely was allow'd due warning.

KENNEDY.

No, truly was she not ; far other fears
Ruffled our lady's breast ; not at her death,
But at her bold deliverer she trembled.
Freedom was sworn to us ; this very night,
Mortimer should have borne us from this place,
And between fear and hope, trembling and doubting
Whether her royal person and sacred honour
To trust to the daring youth—in fears like these,
The queen sat palely, watching for the dawn.
A sudden uproar sounded through the castle,
Knocking and heavy hammering reached our ears
We thought the hour of our deliverance come,
Hope sprang a-tiptoe, and sweet love of freedom
Rush'd irresistible through every heart ;
The doors flew wide, and Paulet stood before us—
And told us that the sounds beneath our feet
Was the noise of building up the hideous scaffold.

[*She turns from him, weeping bitterly.*]

MELVIL.

Merciful Heaven! oh tell me, how endured
The queen this dreadful change from life to death?

KENNEDY (*after a pause in which she collects herself*).

Suddenly—without pause—in one dire moment,
The change smote her from that which is of time,
To what eternal is; God gave her grace
In this one instant bravely back to thrust
All earthly hope, and with a stedfast soul,
Made strong by faith, to seize at once on heaven.
No dastard hue of fear, no weak complaint,
Disgraced our queen: only, when first she heard
Lord Leicester's villainous treason, and the fate
Of the true-hearted youth murder'd for her,
And saw the sorrow of his poor old uncle,
Whose latest hope died in his death—then only
The tears flow'd forth, and not for her own fate,
But for the suffering of her enemy.

MELVIL.

Where is she? May I not behold her face?

KENNEDY.

The rest of the night she spent in fervent prayer—
She wrote farewells to her nearest friends and kindred,
And with a firm hand drew her latest testament.
Now she is taking a few moments' rest—
Her last of earthly sleep now gently soothes her.

MELVIL.

Who stays by her?

KENNEDY.

Burgoyne, her highness' leech,
And the women of her chamber.

[*Enter* MARGARET KURL.

How now, Kurl,

Is our mistress risen?

KURL.

Up, and already dress'd;

She asks for you.

KENNEDY.

I come; nay, follow not,
I must prepare our lady for your sight.

[*Exit* KENNEDY.

KURL.

Melvil! her highness' Master of the Household.

MELVIL.

The same.

KURL.

Alas! nor house nor household more.
Melvil, you come from London; of my husband
Bring you no tidings?

MELVIL.

Yes, he will be free,

So runs the rumour—when—

KURL.

The queen is dead.

The shameless traitor ! e'en by him alone

Is our dear lady murder'd ; his false witness

Drags her to death !

MELVIL.

'T is even so.

KURL.

A curse

Deeper than hell seize on his traitor's soul !

For he hath lied, and is a murderer.

MELVIL.

Take heed to your words.

KURL.

Before their judgment seat

I'll swear and prove it—cast it in his teeth,

And fill the whole world with his infamy.

She's innocent !

MELVIL.

God grant she may be so !

[*Enter* BURGOYNE.

BURGOYNE.

Melvil !

MELVIL.

Burgoyne !

[*They embrace.*

BURGOYNE.

Good mistress Margaret,
Fetch hither for her grace a cup of wine.

MELVIL.

How ?—is she sick ?

BURGOYNE.

Nay—strong, and of good cheer,
And saith she hath no need to break her fast ;
But she has yet much terror to encounter,
And it shall ne'er be said by those who hate her,
That the grim sight of death whitens her cheeks,
When nature fails alone in physical strength.

[*Enter* KENNEDY.

MELVIL.

Now will she see me ?

KENNEDY.

You shall see her straight.
You gaze around you with astonishment,
And in your glance I read what moves your wonder ;

Costly appliances for easy life,
And all these shining precious baubles, gather'd
In the black house of doom. O sir! while living,
Stint and privation daily she endured;
Plenty and splendour have come here with death.

*[Enter two of the queen's women dressed in mourning;
at the sight of MELVIL they break out in weeping.]*

MELVIL.

Oh, fatal day! oh, what a meeting, Gertrude!
Rosamond!

FIRST LADY.

She hath sent us all away.
Alone, for the last time, she seeks her God.

*[Enter MARGARET KURL with a goblet of wine; she sets it
on a table, and falls pale and trembling into a chair.]*

MELVIL.

What ails you, mistress? What new woe befalls us?

KURL.

O God!

BURGOYNE.

What is 't?

KURL.

Great God, what have I seen!

MELVIL.

Nay, but compose yourself and speak; what is it?

KURL.

As in my hand the wine goblet I bore,
And slowly mounted the great stairs that lead
From the hall below, a door was open'd wide,
And I beheld—O God ! I saw—

MELVIL.

Speak—what ?

KURL.

The walls all hung with black ; a mighty scaffold,
All wrapped in black, reared itself from the floor ;
In the midst a cushion, block, and glittering axe.
The hall was filled with men, who round the scaffold
Thronging, with bloody looks stood greedily,
Waiting their victim.

ROSAMOND.

God have mercy on her !

MELVIL.

Peace now, control yourselves, she comes !

[*Enter MARY, splendidly dressed in white ; round her neck, fastened to a chain of precious stones, is an *Agnus Dei* ; a rosary hangs at her girdle ; she holds a crucifix in her hand ; a diadem is on her head, and a long black veil is thrown back from her hair ; when she enters, all the others divide on either side, giving signs of the bitterest grief. MELVIL, overcome with sorrow, has sunk upon his knee.*

MARY (*gazing round the circle with a calm serenity*).

Wherefore lament ye ? Wherefore weep ye ? Rather
Rejoice with me, that my long race of misery

At length is run. My chains have fallen off,
My prison gates stand wide, and my glad soul
On angels' wings soars to eternal freedom!
When to mine enemy's hand I was deliver'd
To endure unworthy insult and contempt,
And thralldom, shameful for a free-born queen—
Then ye did well to weep. Oh, weep not now!
Beneficent and healing, Death draws near,
That solemn friend, under whose sable wings
My sorrow shall lie hid for evermore.
From my deep humiliation honour springs,
Upon my head again I feel my crown,
And in my soul once more a royal pride.

[*Seeing* MELVIL.

How, Melvil here! nay, not so. Good, good Melvil,
Stand up, for to thy queen's last earthly triumph
Thou'rt come—not to her death. Oh, praised be God
For this unlook'd-for mercy! In this hour
My fame shall not lie in mine enemy's mouth.
Beside me in mine agony shall stand
One witness for me, unto whom I'm known.
Oh, tell me, Melvil, how has all fared with thee
In this unfriendly and ungodly land,
Since thou wert banish'd from thy poor queen's sight?
The thought of thee has ofttimes made me woe.

MELVIL.

I have known but one hardship—only one—
That I no more might see you, gracious mistress!

MARY.

How is it with Didier, my faithful chamberlain?
But I bethink me—it is well with him;
He was an old man; doubtless he is dead.

MELVIL.

God has not granted him so great a mercy;
He lives to weep on your untimely bier.

MARY.

Alas! before I die, not to have known
The joy of clasping one beloved head,
Or strain'd the hand of one of mine own kindred.
But it is well; 'mongst strangers I shall die,
And see at least no other tears but yours.
Melvil, my latest wishes for my loved ones
I lay within your faithful breast:—I bless
My brother-in-law the Most Christian King of France,
And the whole royal house of France I greet;
My uncle cardinal I reverently bless,
And Henry of Guise, my ever noble cousin;
I bless the pope, the holy vicar of Christ,
Who will send back his precious blessing to me;
And the Most Catholic King of Spain, who nobly
Offer'd himself my champion and avenger.
All of them are remember'd in my will;
Nor will they the last tokens of my love
Value the less that they are poor in value.

[Turning to her servants.

I have commended your forlorn estate
To the King of France, my royal brother, who
Will care for you and find you another home.
Tarry not here; let no proud English eyes
Feed their disdain with sight of your despair;
Nor in the dust behold who did me service.
Even by this image of the Crucified
Promise me all to leave this fatal land
So soon as I shall have gone hence for ever.

MELVIL (*laying his hand on the crucifix*).

I swear it, in the name of all of these !

MARY.

Beggar'd as I am, all that remains to me—
All that I yet have leave to call my own—
I have divided to you; and I trust
That my last will shall meet with due respect.
These, the sad trappings of my death journey,
I do but borrow. Lend me but once more
Earth's poor adornings, on my way to heav'n.

[*To her younger women.*

To you, my Alice, Gertrude, Rosamond,
I do bequeath my pearls and my attirings;
Such baubles well become your youthful years.

[*To KURL.*

Margaret, thou hast the first claim on my bounty,
For thou of all I part from art the saddest.
That I do not avenge on thee the guilt

Of thy unhappy husband, thou wilt find
By my bequest. My dearest, truest Hannah!
What are to thee jewels of price or gold?
To thee I leave my last remembrance—take
This handkerchief; I have with mine own hand
Wrought it for thee, in my long prison hours;
And many of my tears are therein woven.
Over my eyes bind thou this handkerchief—
When it is time. This last and dearest office
Will I receive from thee, my faithful Hannah.

KENNEDY.

O Melvil, how shall I endure—

MARY.

Come now,
Come all of ye, and take my last farewell!
Fare thee well Margaret, and farewell my Alice;
Thanks, Burgoyne, for thy true and faithful service.
Thy lips are burning hot, poor Gertrude! Oh,
Sore hated have I been—but well loved, too;
Some noble-minded man shall be thy mate,
Whose love shall give thy warm heart happiness.
My Bertha, thou hast chosen the better part,
And Heaven's holy bride shalt thou become.
Haste thou thy sacred calling to fulfil.
How treacherous are the blessings of this earth
Learn from thy queen. Enough; now all is over—
Farewell! farewell! for ever fare ye well!

[*She turns herself quickly from them. Exeunt all but MELVIL.*]

MARY.

Thus have I set my earthly house in order,
And hope in debt to no one to depart
Out of this world. One thing alone remains,
Melvil—one thing which the yet fetter'd soul
Craves ere it soars in joy and freedom hence.

MELVIL.

Utter your wish ; lighten your loaded heart.
To your true friend and servant speak your care.

MARY.

I stand upon the threshold of eternity ;
Before the Almighty Judge soon must I stand ;
And yet I have not made my last atonement.
No priest of our Holy Church has access to me ;
And from the hand of a false priest I loathe
To take the holy bread of the Eucharist.
In the true faith of my own Church I die,
That can alone give peace unto my soul.

MELVIL.

Then bid your heart be still. Heaven will accept
Your deep desire ev'n as its own fulfilment.
The pow'r of tyrants can but bind our hands ;
The soul on its own longing springs to God.
The letter is dead ; the spirit, the spirit lives !

MARY.

True, Melvil; but, alas! 't is not enough;
Weak earthly faith craves for an earthly sign,
By which it makes Heaven's highest boon its own.
For this God became man; for this is clothed
The invisible and heavenly gift of grace,
Mysteriously in an outward visible form.
Our Church alone, the high, the holy one,
Builds up the ladder that we climb to heaven,
The universal Catholic Church, well named!
For of the faith of all grows faith of each.
There thousands pray and worship; there the flame
Of adoration glows; and, rapt on wings
Of fire, the spirit is borne away to heaven.
Ah, blessed they! to whom the joy is given
To kneel together in God's holy house!
Deck'd is the altar, and the tapers burning;
Solemnly toll the bells; the incense rises;
The bishop, radiant in his sacred vestments,
Takes forth the cup and blesses it; and lo!
The ineffable wonder of miraculous change!
Prone on the earth before their present God
The people fall, believing and adoring.
Me miserable! I alone am barr'd;
Heaven's gracious gift to all reaches not me.

MELVIL.

Yea, it doth reach thee—yea, it is beside thee.
Trust the All Powerful! the wither'd staff

Can in the hand of faith put forth fresh buds ;
And He that from the rock smote living waters
Can in thy prison build Himself an altar,
And change this cup of corporal refreshment
To one that shall give quickening to thy soul.

[He takes the cup from the table.]

MARY.

What say'st thou, Melvil? Yea, I comprehend thee.
No priest, no Church, no sacrament is here ;
Yet hath my Saviour spoken it—' When two
Or three are gather'd in My name together,
There am I in the midst.' The Lord hath said it.
What matters, then, the priest, to the pure heart,
And to th' unspotted soul! Be thou to me,
Though unordain'd a priest, God's messenger,
Bringing me peace; to thee will I confess
Myself of all my sins, and from thy lips
Will I receive my latest absolution.

MELVIL.

Since thus thy soul, mightily urged, doth urge thee,
Know, queen, that to thy comfort God hath wrought
Another wonder. No priest, no Church is here,
No sacrament say'st thou? Yea, but the Priest
And Sacrificial God are present here.

*[He uncovers his head, and shows the tonsure, and also
discovers the holy wafer in a golden casket.]*

I am a consecrated priest : to hear
Thy last confession, and on death's drear path
To bring thee peace, have I upon my head
Received the sevenfold sign ; and this blest bread—
By the Holy Father blest—I bring to thee.

MARY.

Oh, even on the threshold of grim death
I meet a heavenly joy prepared for me !
Hither th' immortal minister descends
On golden clouds—as erst the glorious angel
Who set the Apostle from his fetters free !
Him can no bolt oppose, no gaoler's sword ;
Through close-barr'd portals in his might he walks,
And 'mid the deepest dungeon darkness shines.
Even so hath Heaven's messenger surprised me,
By every earthly friend left and betray'd ;
And thou, my servant once, art now become
Servant of the living God, who speaks through thee.
As wont thy knees of yore to bend to me,
So in the dust I now to thee bow down.
[She falls on her knees.

MELVIL (*making the sign of the cross over her*).

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost !
Queen Mary, hast thou search'd thy heart ? Swear'st thou
The truth to utter to the God of truth ?

MARY.

My heart lies open before thee and Him.

MELVIL.

Speak, what offence doth conscience point to thee
Unreconciled since thou didst last confess?

MARY.

My heart hath been brim full of cankerous hate;
Fierce thoughts of vengeance in my breast have burn'd;
For God's forgiveness, sinner! I dared hope,
And could not mine own fellow-sinner pardon.

MELVIL.

Dost thou repent this sin? Art thou resolved
In charity with all to leave this earth?

MARY.

Yea, as I hope by God to be forgiven.

MELVIL.

What other sin cries from thy heart against thee?

MARY.

Ah, not through hate alone, through sinful love
Have I offended even yet more deeply.
My foolish heart was riveted to one
Who hath betray'd and utterly forsaken me.

MELVIL.

Dost thou repent this sin, and is thy heart
Turn'd from its idol-worship back to God?

MARY.

Harder than all the rest, that strife is over,
And riven in twain is this last earthly tie.

MELVIL.

What more against thee doth thy conscience witness?

MARY.

An early stain of blood, long since absolved,
Rises again to fill me with new terrors;
Now in this hour of supreme reckoning
The murky shadow darkens Heaven's doors—
The king, my husband, gave I up to murder,
And paid th' assassin with my heart and hand;
Sorely with holiest rites I made atonement,
But in my soul th' undying worm still gnaws.

MELVIL.

Does thy heart challenge thee for other sins
Not yet confess'd by thee, not yet absolved?

MARY.

Thou knowest all—thou hast my soul's whole burthen.

MELVIL.

To the Omniscient think how near thou art;
Think of the sentence of our holy Church
Against untrue confession—that it is
The sin to everlasting doom decreed,
The awful sin against the Holy Ghost.

MARY.

So may the Everlasting mercy grant me
Victory in death as I have kept back nothing.

MELVIL.

How! wilt thou, then, deny to God the crime
For which the wrath of man is wreak'd upon thee?
Nought hast thou utter'd of thy partnership
In Babington's and Parry's bloody treason?
For this must thou abide thine earthly death;
But wilt thou dare for this thy death eternal?

MARY.

Lo, I am ready for eternity;
Though I should stand before God's judgment seat
Before the minute hand moved on the dial,
Still have I nought to say but—all is said.

MELVIL.

Beware! the heart is desperately deceitful;
Hast thou not with a cunning double drift
Forborne to utter words that might condemn thee,
While in thy soul thou didst partake the guilt?
But be thou sure no craft can now conceal
Thy inmost thoughts from the searching eye of Heaven.

MARY.

All Europe's sovereigns have I call'd upon
To set me free from these unworthy fetters;

But never, or by word or deed, have I
Aim'd at the life of her, mine enemy.

MELVIL.

Thy secretary, then, hath borne false witness?

MARY.

What I have said is true—what he has sworn
Be God the judge of!

MELVIL.

Then thou goest hence
Firm in thine innocence, to mount the scaffold.

MARY.

God grant me grace that this unmerited doom
May atone the heavy blood-guilt of my youth.

MELVIL.

Depart in peace, and, dying, be thou purified!
Fall at the altar a self-offer'd sacrifice!
Blood may atone the guilt of blood-shedding;
Womanly frailty hath undone thee here,
But in the everlasting realms of light
No mortal stain clings to the blessed spirit.
Strong in the strength that is bestow'd on me
To bind and to unloose, I here pronounce
Of all thy sins the plenary absolution;
Be it unto thee according to thy faith.

[He gives her the wafer.]

Take, eat this body offer'd up for thee——

[He takes the cup of wine from the table, and offers it to her; she hesitates, and waves it from her.]

Take, drink this blood that has been shed for thee——

Take it; the pope allows thee this great favour,

In death shalt thou enjoy the highest privilege

Of kings, the holy priesthood's special right.

[She drinks from the cup.]

And as thou now in this thy earthly body,

Mysteriously art to thy God united,

So mayst thou in the realms of heav'nly joy,

Where is no guilt, nor any weeping more,

A fair and glorious angel be united

To the bless'd host of the redeem'd for ever!

[He sets down the cup. A noise is heard without. MELVIL covers his head and goes to the door; while MARY remains on her knees absorbed in prayer.]

MELVIL.

A struggle sharp and fierce awaits thee yet;

Hast thou the strength to conquer every throb

Of bitterness and hatred?

MARY.

I fear nothing:

My love and hate are offer'd up to God.

MELVIL.

Be ready to receive the Lords of Leicester

And Burleigh; they are at hand.

[Enter LEICESTER, BURLEIGH, and PAULET; the first remains in the background with his eyes cast down; BURLEIGH, who observes his demeanour, advances between him and the queen.]

BURLEIGH.

I am come, Lady Stuart,
To receive your last commands.

MARY.

My lord, I thank you.

BURLEIGH.

It is the will of our gracious queen, that nothing
Within the scope of reason be denied you.

MARY.

My will contains my latest wishes; that
I have committed to Sir Amias Paulet;
I trust it will be faithfully fulfill'd.

PAULET.

Be sure it shall.

MARY.

I beg that all my servants
Be left in freedom to return to Scotland,
Or else to France, as they themselves desire.

BURLEIGH.

That shall be as you wish.

MARY.

And since my body
Must not be laid in consecrated ground,
Let these my faithful followers be allow'd
To bear my heart to France, to my own kindred.
Ah, it dwelt ever there!

BURLEIGH.

It shall be done:
Have you bethought you—

MARY.

To the queen of England,
Carry a sister's greeting from me—for my death
Tell her I do forgive her heartily,
And for my passionate words of yesterday
Heartily beg her pardon. God preserve her!
And send her happily to reign!

BURLEIGH.

Have you, madam,
Bethought you better of the chaplain's presence?

MARY.

I have made my peace with heaven. Sir Amias Paulet,
Innocently I have caused you heavy grief,
And robb'd you of the prop of your old age;
Oh, let me hope you will not curse my memory!

PAULET (*gives her his hand*).

May God be with you, and go hence in peace !

[HANNAH KENNEDY, and the queen's women rush in with signs of terror : they are followed by the Sheriff with his wand of office ; a guard of armed men is seen through the open door.

MARY.

What ails thee, Hannah ? ay—even so—is 't time ?

The sheriff comes to marshal me to death ;

And it must be fulfill'd—farewell ! farewell !

[*The women cling round her with passionate grief.*

MARY (*to MELVIL*).

Most worthy sir, you and my truest Hannah

Will keep me company unto the end ;

My lord, you 'll not deny me this poor comfort.

BURLEIGH.

I have no power to grant it.

MARY.

How, my lord !

Have you power to refuse so small a boon ?

Show some respect to my sex at least ; by whom

Is the last service to be render'd me ?

Never can it be my sister's will in me

To outrage womanhood, by suffering

That the coarse hands of men should touch my person.

BURLEIGH.

It may not be ; no woman can ascend
The scaffold with you ; with her tears and cries—

MARY.

She shall not weep : I will myself be surety
For the stedfast courage of my truest Hannah.
Be merciful, my lord, and do not now
Separate me from my faithful nurse ;
Into her arms she first received my life,
Let her kind tender hand lead me to death.

PAULET.

Oh, let it be !

BURLEIGH.

So be it !

MARY.

In this world

Nothing remains. (*Kissing the crucifix*)—My Saviour !
my Redeemer !

As once thine arms were stretched upon the cross,
Open them wide in mercy to receive me !

[*She turns to go, and suddenly perceives the* EARL OF
LEICESTER ; *she trembles, her knees give way, and she*
is about to sink to the earth ; LEICESTER *catches her*
and supports her in his arms ; she looks at him in
silence ; he turns his eyes away ; at length she speaks.

MARY.

You keep your word, Lord Leicester; you did promise
Your arm should lead me from this prison forth—
And in my need you lend it to me now.

[*He seems annihilated; she proceeds in a gentle tone.*

Yes, Leicester, and it was not freedom only
I thought to owe thee; it was freedom, dear
Because thy gift; 't was life, rich with thy love.
Now that I am upon my way to heaven
A blessed spirit to become, who never
By earthly love can be again assail'd,
I can confess the weakness that is conquer'd.
My cheeks, already pale with the cold wind,
That blows upon them from my open grave,
Shall not grow red to tell thee how I've loved thee.
Farewell! and if thou canst, mayst thou be happy!
It was thy fate to choose between two queens:
A tender, loving heart hast thou betray'd
And lost, to win a hard and haughty one.
Kneel at the footstool of Elizabeth,
May thy reward not prove thy chastisement!
Farewell! the bitterness of death is past!

[*She goes out, preceded by the Sheriff, and supported by MELVIL and HANNAH; BURLEIGH and PAULET follow; the others remain weeping and watching her till she is out of sight, they then disperse through the side doors.*

LEICESTER (*alone*).

And yet I live! I can endure to live!

This roof above my head falls not to crush me.
No yawning chasm opens itself in the earth
To swallow the most loathsome wretch upon it.
What have I done ! What precious pearl of price
Have I flung from me ! What pure heavenly bliss
Have I juggled with and lost. She goes—she goes,
A sainted soul to peace, and I remain
With the despairing anguish of the damn'd !
Where is the firm resolve that I brought hither
To stifle the heart's low wail of love and pity,
And see her head fall with unwinking eyes ?
Her glance of light quickens my dead remorse,
And even in death she winds me in love's fetters.
O fool ! 't is not for thee—'t is no more time
To melt away in soft and womanish pity.
The bliss of love blooms not upon thy path ;
In iron harness triple case thy breast,
And be thy forehead like a rock of brass,
If thou wouldst not the guerdon of thy baseness
Even now let slip. Fulfill thy appointed task ;
Strangle this puling grief. With eyes of stone
Look on her death. I will—I will behold it—

*[He goes with determined steps towards the door through
which MARY had passed, but stops halfway.]*

In vain—in vain ! Hell's terrors seize upon me.
I cannot look upon that hideous spectacle.
I cannot see her die. Hark ! what was that ?

They are already there; beneath my feet
The bloody work of slaughter is prepared;
I hear their voices—hence, away! away!
Forth from this house of horror and of death!

*[He rushes to one of the doors and finds
it fastened; he returns.]*

My feet are riveted to this fatal floor.
What! must I hear that which I dare not see!
The chaplain's voice! he is exhorting her.
She interrupts him—hark! she prays aloud
With stedfast voice—all 's still again—all 's still.
Sobbing alone I hear, and woman's wailing.
She is disrobed. Hark! now they roll away
Her seat, she kneels upon the cushion, and bows
Her head—

*[After speaking the last words with increasing emotion, he
remains breathless for a moment; then suddenly, with
a shudder of horror, he starts and falls fainting on the
ground. A prolonged confused acclamation of voices
is heard from below.]*

SCENE 2.

*The same chamber in the Palace as in the Fourth Act. Enter by a side
door ELIZABETH, whose countenance and gestures betray the utmost
disturbance.*

ELIZABETH.

Yet no one here! No one—when comes the evening!
The sun stands still on the highway of heaven,

And I must yet lie stretch'd upon the rack.
Is 't done?—or not? I dare not ask—the yea.
And nay fill me alike with terror. Leicester
Comes not, and Burleigh tarries too. They had
Command to see fulfill'd the utmost sentence.
If they are gone from London it *is* done.
The shaft is sped—it flies—it has struck home!
Not for my kingdom can I longer hold. Who 's there?

[*Enter a PAGE.*

ELIZABETH.

Art thou return'd alone? Where are the lords?

PAGE.

My Lord of Leicester and the Lord High Treasurer—

ELIZABETH (*breathless*).

Where are they?

PAGE.

Not in London, madam.

ELIZABETH.

Gone!

Where are they gone?

PAGE.

No one could tell me, madam.

Before the day dawn'd, suddenly and secretly,
They left the city.

ELIZABETH (*exclaims suddenly*).

I am Queen of England !

[*She walks up and down in extreme agitation.*]

Go call to me—no—stay—she 's dead at last !

And I have room to live upon the earth !

Why do I shake ? why does this terror clutch me ?

The grave holds all my fear, and who dare say

I did it ? Tears ! she shall have tears enough ;

An ocean of them. Why art thou standing there ?

Bid hither instantly my secretary

Davidson ; send for Lord Shrewsbury—he 's here !

[*Exit PAGE. Enter SHREWSBURY.*]

ELIZABETH.

Welcome, my noble lord ! what brings you hither

At this late hour ? It must be weighty matter—

SHREWSBURY.

Great queen ! my careful heart, troubled for your fame,

Drove me to-day to the Tower, where Kurl and Nau,

The secretaries of Mary Stuart, lie.

Once more I sought their testimony's truth

To sift. Amazed and much unwillingly,

The Lieutenant of the Tower admitted me,

But only did so upon sternest threats.

God, what a fearful sight there met my eyes !

With wild disorder'd hair and maniac glances,

Like one possess'd by the furies, on his bed

The Scotchman Kurl lay prone ; hardly the wretch
Beheld and knew me, ere upon the earth
He grovell'd at my feet, embraced my knees
Like a writhing worm, and shrieking in despair
Adjured me to make known to him the fate
Of the Queen of Scots, his mistress ; for a rumour
That she was doom'd to death had made its way
Into those iron walls. I told him 't was the truth,
And that she died upon his witness 'gainst her ;
Whereat he sprung up foaming, and falling on
His wretched fellow-prisoner hurl'd him down
To the earth, with all the giant strength of madness,
Striving to strangle him. We hardly tore
The miserable creature from his gripe,
When 'gainst himself his fury turn'd ; he smote
His breast with his clench'd hands, and cursed himself,
And all the company of the fiends of hell.
He has borne false witness, and the fatal letter
Written to Babington, to which he swore,
Was forged ; he did himself write down the words
Other than those the queen did bid him write,
And urged the wretched Nau to the like villany.
These things confess'd, he flung the window wide
With furious force, and call'd aloud in the street,
Down to the throng, who gathering ran together
That he was Mary's secretary—the wretch
Who wrongly had accused her—the accurs'd
False witness !

ELIZABETH.

Nay, but he was mad, indeed!
The words of a raving madman can prove nothing.

SHREWSBURY.

The madman's madness though proves all the more;
O madam, I implore you without delay,
Give order for a new examination.

ELIZABETH.

I will do so, my lord, at your request,
Not that I may believe that overhastily
My peers have judged this matter; but for you,
And the quieting of your mind, let there be given
Order for a new examination: 't is well
There yet is time for it! on our kingly honour
No shadow of a doubt shall linger; now —

[Enter DAVISON.

The sentence that I gave into your hand,
Where is it?

DAVISON (*in the greatest amazement*).

The sentence!

ELIZABETH.

Ay, that I gave
Yesterday to your keeping.

DAVISON.

To my keeping?

ELIZABETH.

The people clamour'd for the signing of it,
And to their will compell'd to yield, I sign'd it,
By them urged to the deed; and to your hand
I gave the paper, meaning to give some respite
Of time, as I told you then; now give it!

SHREWSBURY.

Good sir, deliver it; things are much alter'd;
A new examination must be held.

ELIZABETH.

Dream not so long about it; where's the sentence?

DAVISON.

I'm breathless with amazement and dismay!

ELIZABETH (*hastily*).

Now I well hope, sir —

DAVISON.

I am ruin'd, lost!

I have it not.

ELIZABETH.

How! what!

SHREWSBURY.

Great God in heaven !

DAVISON.

Since yesterday, Lord Burleigh has possess'd it.

ELIZABETH.

Wretch ! is it thus thou hast obey'd my words ?
Did I not bid thee hold it for thy life.

DAVISON.

That was not your command, madam !

ELIZABETH.

How, villain !

Wilt thou gainsay me, reptile that thou art ?
When did I bid thee give it to Lord Burleigh ?

DAVISON.

Not in those very words—not clearly—but—

ELIZABETH.

Villainous slave ! hast thou dared make my word
Of thy own bloody thought interpreter ?
Woe be to thee if evil has befallen
From this thy self-usurp'd authority !
Thy life shall pay for it ! My Lord of Shrewsbury,
You see how my name is palter'd with.

SHREWSBURY.

I see—O Heav'n!

ELIZABETH.

Say you?

SHREWSBURY.

If Master Davison

Has done this deed upon his own allowance
And risk, without your knowledge or consent,
He must before the high court of the peers
Be straight arraign'd, and to all future time
His name be given up to execration.

[Enter BURLEIGH, who kneels to the queen.]

BURLEIGH.

Long live my sovereign queen and mistress! May
The enemies of these island realms all fall
Like Mary Stuart!

[SHREWSBURY covers his face; DAVISON
wings his hands despairingly.]

ELIZABETH.

My Lord Burleigh

Had you received command of death from me?

BURLEIGH.

No, royal madam, but from Davison.

ELIZABETH.

In my name did he give it? in my name?

BURLEIGH.

No, my dread lady, but—

ELIZABETH.

And you have dared
To do this deed without our will being known.
The sentence was a righteous one, the world
Dare wag no tongue against it ; but for you,
Who have thrust yourself between it and our mercy,
We forthwith from our presence banish you.
(*To* DAVISON.) For this fellow, a sharper doom remains,
Who boldly daring to o'erstep his duty,
A holy trust has ventured to betray.
To the Tower with him ! he shall stand his trial
For life and all he is possessed of ! Noble Talbot,
Thou—thou alone of all my counsellors
Have I found honest ; henceforth thou shalt be
My friend and guide !

SHREWSBURY.

Nay, madam, drive not from you
These your true friends ; cast not in prison those
Who have wrought for you, and are silent now
For your sake only. But for me, great queen !
Give leave that I return into your keeping
The seal, which for twelve years you have trusted to me.

ELIZABETH.

Shrewsbury, thou wilt not at this hour forsake me ?

SHREWSBURY.

Forgive me, madam ! I am grown too old,
And this right hand might prove too stiff, I fear,
To seal your latest deeds of sovereignty.

ELIZABETH.

So he that saved my life abandons me.

SHREWSBURY.

'Tis little I have done ; your nobler life
I could not save ; live, and reign happily !
Your foe is dead, you have no more to fear,
Nor further need to use dissimulation.

[*Enter the* EARL OF KENT.

ELIZABETH.

Call hither the Earl of Leicester !

KENT.

Madam,
The earl has suddenly taken ship for France.

END OF

' MARY STUART. '

MADemoiselle DE BELLE ISLE.

TRANSLATED

FROM THE FRENCH OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

INTRODUCTION.

THE refined and fashionable audiences who, some years ago, used to applaud at the St. James's Theatre *Mademoiselle Plessis*, in the play of *Mademoiselle de Belle Isle*, and *Mademoiselle Dejazet*, in the far more startling parts and pieces which were there represented for the edification of the best London society, would, in all probability, have objected to an *English* version of Dumas' clever play, upon the score of its immorality. It is not for me to determine whether the aristocratic audiences at the St. James's Theatre did not understand what they heard, or whether the French language has a special charm for rendering inoffensive what plain English fails to recommend. However that may be, I have always thought *Mademoiselle de Belle Isle* one of the most interesting and brilliant productions of that great resource of English dramatists, the modern French stage, and regretted extremely the difficulty of so modifying it as to make it acceptable to an English audience in an English theatre. The present translation and alteration of the piece is an attempt to do this, but I do not flatter myself that I have succeeded; for the incident of the nocturnal meeting upon which the play turns cannot be suppressed, and though by

substituting the Duke de Richelieu's much misused wife for the profligate Marquise de Prie, I have done my best with the plot, I fear I have only destroyed a very clever picture of the manners and morals of the day, without having been able to make the piece unobjectionable for the English stage.

Dramatis Personæ.

THE DUKE DE RICHELIEU.	}	<i>Gentlemen of the Court of Louis XV.</i>
THE DUKE D'AUMONT.		
THE CHEVALIER D'AUVRAY.		
THE CHEVALIER D'AUBIGNY.		
CHAMILLAC.		
THE ABBÉ DE ROSANNE.		

THE MARCHIONESS DE VALCOUR.
GABRIELLA DE BELLE ISLE.
MARIETTE.

Gentlemen and Ladies of the Court, Footmen, Pages, &c. &c.

*The Scene is in the Palace of the DUKE DE BOURBON, at Chantilly,
near Paris.*

ACT I.

SCENE 1.

The Marchioness's dressing-room; she is seated at her toilet.

MADAME DE VALCOUR *and* MARIETTE.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh ! go on, go on to the signature ; not one of these letters but I know its contents by heart beforehand.

MARIETTE.

Your ladyship is vastly indifferent, this morning.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Why, canst thou not see that all these professions of devoted love and eternal constancy are not half so much addressed to any poor personal merit of mine as to my supposed influence with his Grace the Duke of Bourbon, prime minister of his Majesty. Burn, child ! burn, burn !

MARIETTE (*reading*).

Monsieur de Nocé—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Burn !

MARIETTE.

Monsieur de Duras—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Burn!

MARIETTE.

Monsieur d'Aumont—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Burn, burn, burn!

MARIETTE.

Here's lots of love, all vanishing in smoke!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Nothing from Monsieur de Richelieu?

MARIETTE.

Nothing.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Heigho!

MARIETTE.

Really, madam, your ladyship must permit me to say, that I feel quite anxious about you.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Anxious! And why pray?

MARIETTE.

Why, to tell you the truth, madam, you appear to me threatened with a serious attachment.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

What, to the Duke de Richelieu ?

MARIETTE.

I'm in a fever about it. Take care, madam ; people have died of love, I believe.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Pshaw !

MARIETTE.

Poor Mrs. Valens !

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

The upholsterer's wife ? I believe that kind of people do die of that sort of thing sometimes.

MARIETTE.

Well, if I were your ladyship, I'd take some care, however.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Pray, what makes thee suppose my case so dangerous ?

MARIETTE.

All the symptoms, madam.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

For instance—

MARIETTE.

Your ladyship's anxiety when Monsieur de Richelieu's letters don't arrive. Your indifference to whole heaps of other folk's epistles, a constancy of interest which, as far as I can observe, has lasted three whole weeks.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Three weeks, eh? really, so long as that! I believe you have only been in my service so long.

MARIETTE.

Just so long, my lady; but that's a perfect lover's eternity! and I really think your ladyship's complaint has reached the highest pitch of danger. I only hope it an't catching.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I could astonish thee much more, were I to tell thee—

MARIETTE.

Oh! what, madam?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

How inquisitive you are, child!

MARIETTE.

I hope your ladyship will excuse me; but it is so long since I've had the pleasure of being astonished at anything.

[*Enter a SERVANT.*

SERVANT.

An ecclesiastic, the Abbé de Rosanne, desires to know when your ladyship would allow him an audience?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Hey!

[*SERVANT.*

The Abbé de Rosanne!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh! admit him; admit him instantly! And do you, Mariette, leave me for the present.

[*Exit MARIETTE.*

How many years have passed since I have seen him! How full of strange events those years have been! and now, I, who have struggled for so long, unaided, in this sea of difficulties, find, at the very moment of utter discouragement, the friend, the counsellor, the guide of my early youth.

[*Enter SERVANT and MONSIEUR DE ROSANNE.*

ROSANNE.

May an obscure and humble individual of my grave calling be permitted to trespass for a few moments, madam, upon your time and attention?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

He does not know me; he actually does not know me!

ROSANNE.

I am aware that my dress and manner must form a strange and discordant contrast to those of your usual solicitors, madam, and that a poor country curate will, probably, commit more than one conventional sin, while addressing the brilliant Marchioness de Valcour, the presiding divinity of a gay court, the mistress of the prime minister of France.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

No, no, no ! not from you that title, which, however, in your eyes alone probably degrades me. Is it possible you have forgotten Elise de Varennes, your pupil at the Convent of St. Cyr, in those happy, happy days, when you were my confessor, and I had so little to confess !

ROSANNE.

Good Heavens ! Mademoiselle de Varennes, the Duke de Bourbon's niece !

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Therefore most certainly not his mistress ; even so, my dear, dear Abbé !

ROSANNE.

But how—when—where ?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh! sit down, sit down, and let me again pour my confession into your ear, and receive the consolation of your sympathy, the benefit of your advice. You remember, that just at the time when you were appointed to the distant mission—

ROSANNE.

Whence I have only returned within these few days, after ten years' absence from my native land.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I, a child of scarce fourteen years, was betrothed to Monsieur de Fronsac, himself only sixteen—now, the too notorious Duke de Richelieu. I returned, after the ceremony, to my convent—my husband to the superintendance of his tutor, under whose care he was to travel, and finish his education, till such time as we were considered old enough to fulfill the contract we had entered into.

ROSANNE.

'Tis a foolish custom, a foolish custom, and has bred more mischief and misery than virtue or happiness, I fear. Go on, my dear daughter.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

How the four years prescribed were spent by him I know not—but, alas, can well imagine! By me, father,

they were spent in one blissful dream of the happiness that awaited me—the fair youthful face and form of my boy husband perpetually flitted before my fancy, and every day told me that time was but maturing his graces and perfecting his mind—so passed those four long years to me, in joyful anticipation of my future fate. Judge, oh, judge of the bitterness of my disappointment—of the anguish, shame, and indignation I felt, when within a week of the time appointed for the solemnisation of our marriage, the realisation of all those happy, happy visions—

ROSANNE.

Go on, my dear child!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

No; at the bare recollection of the cruel insult my emotion chokes me even now! Within a week, I say, of the day when my husband should have claimed me, I received from him this letter. Here it is—oh, here it is! I have worn it like a hardening talisman against my heart from that moment, and I sometimes think it has turned my very heart to stone!

ROSANNE (*reads*).

‘Mademoiselle — A contract entered into when we were both of us children, and utterly unable to judge or choose for ourselves, cannot, I am persuaded, appear binding in the eyes of a person of the excellent judgment

I am told you possess. It is therefore, I am sure, as much for your satisfaction as my own that I propose relieving you and myself from the absurd obligations which have been thrust upon us by others. A divorce will be easily and speedily obtained—and I flatter myself, mademoiselle, that this step will prove the sincerity with which I remain,

‘ Your very obedient humble servant,

‘ RICHELIEU.’

Poor child! poor child!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Your eyes are filled with tears; you feel this bitter blow, this withering mortification for me! Oh, but years have passed since then, and I have led such a life, and lived among such people, and seen such things, that my tears never come out of my heart now—and I laugh all day long at everything, for existence itself has become a jest and a mockery to me.

ROSANNE.

This is terrible, indeed! But how came this divorce not to take place?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Because I fell mortally sick upon this very blow—and at one time of my illness was supposed dead. Monsieur de Richelieu was informed of the fortunate

circumstance of my demise, and, when I recovered, I had n't the heart to have him undeceived. You see, my dear Abbé, dying was more convenient even than divorcing, and saved a world of trouble.

ROSANNE.

And since then—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Since then, become of age, and inheriting an independent fortune, I determined to follow the course of this very man—my husband—for he is my husband still; and for now six years I have known all the details of a life, whose reckless profligacy may have wearied Heaven, but has not destroyed my love.

ROSANNE.

You love this man!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Alas, with all my soul! There is no transformation, no disguise, no assumption that I have not undergone, to follow him in all the tortuous paths where he deigns to walk; disgusted, indignant, heart sick, spirit weary, I have been ready to die with grief and shame at his proceedings. Nevertheless, sometimes I have been the means of healing those wounds he had inflicted; sometimes I have interposed between his fatal arts and women about to fall victims to them. I have spared him some

crimes ; I have, as far as I could, atoned for those I could not prevent ; I have done some good to him, for him. Oh, father, I do not regret the agony I have suffered, while thus struggling to reclaim my husband.

ROSANNE.

Bless you, my dear, dear child ! and Heaven will bless you, and will crown your efforts with success ! But how, in the name of wonder, is it that I find you here, in your uncle's palace—and, stranger than all, under the title of his mistress ?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

The singular life I was leading, the profuseness of my expenditure, my isolated position, and some poor remains of personal beauty, which all this sorrow had not destroyed, made me soon an object of curiosity and observation. I found my situation become every day more difficult and dangerous, and at length I had recourse to my uncle, who, in common with the world, and my most affectionate husband, believed me dead.

ROSANNE.

I see ; he received you, and kept your secret.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Exactly. But the world not being prone to give men and women credit for perfectly disinterested friendship,

and Paris being especially little favourable to platonic attachments, the natural inference became that I was the Duke's mistress.

ROSANNE.

The name you have assumed—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, yes! I know, might belong to anybody or anything; Valcour—Belcour, to be sure, may stand for anything one pleases; but pray remember, Monsieur l'Abbé, that it is very few people's business, and nobody's interest, here, to trouble their heads about my *calling*.

ROSANNE.

I am sorry you should have lent yourself to a situation involving such a scandal, nevertheless.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Scandal, my dear Abbé! To be sure you have been ten years in the colonies, and may be pardoned your innocence; why, I am considered the most virtuous, as well as the most charming of women—my supposed protector being prime minister. I assure you, not only all the nobles of the court, but all their wives are at my feet; and as for the churchmen, my levees are thronged with bishops, my assemblies with archbishops, and as for curés and abbés—I beg your pardon my dear friend—they positively cost me a fortune in wax-lights, they

make my rooms so dark with their black livery—the only grave thing about them, believe me; and, to be sure, they do all they can by the liveliness, not to say looseness, of their conversation, to atone for the gloominess and stiffness of their costume.

ROSANNE.

And Monsieur de Richelieu still suspects—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Nothing. He is become my most intimate friend; and now, nothing loth, brings me the confidence which formerly I was forced to surprise; 't is a curious position, let me tell you, that of a wife, who is her husband's unknown confidant.

ROSANNE.

It seems strange to me that he has never addressed you as a lover.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Instinct, depend upon it! he would, I've no doubt, if I had not been his wife.

ROSANNE.

How have you the heart to jest?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I've positively no heart left for anything else. Besides, in the life I lead, and a short observation will convince

you of the fact, laughing has often precisely the signification of tears and sighs; when one's tired of the one, one takes to the other, and it still means the same thing; and lips that have exhausted the relief of complaint, will utter the pleasantest jests upon their own misery. It's only another way of easing one's heart, believe me, and the heart must be eased some way, you know, or break.

[*Enter a SERVANT.*

SERVANT.

The Duke de Richelieu wishes to be permitted the honour of waiting upon her ladyship.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

The Duke de Richelieu!

SERVANT.

His grace has only this moment arrived from Paris, and wishes to know if her ladyship is visible.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, certainly, admit him! Now, my dear Abbé, will you stay, and see how admirably I carry on this sad farce?

ROSANNE.

No, indeed, for I am not as well bred as your ladyship, and should surely betray myself, or you, or both of us.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You have postponed your suit to the Duke de Bourbon's mistress in listening to Elise de Varenne's story. Never mind; you are sure of my interest, and you have no idea how immense that is! Pray remain in the palace while you stay in Chantilly. I cannot afford to lose you again; it is too great a luxury to have a friend.

ROSANNE.

And I shall ever be yours most devotedly!

[*Exit.*

[*Enter the* DUKE DE RICHELIEU.

RICHELIEU.

How charming of you, to receive me so kindly, even in my boots!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I am always charmed to see you, my dear duke, whatever your costume. So you are just come from Paris.

RICHELIEU.

I arrived ten minutes ago. And what have you been doing here?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Nothing worth being told. The duke has hunted a good deal, and I have received petitions.

RICHELIEU.

I envy the people that ask and receive favours from you.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh! my dear duke, a truce! I thought it was agreed that there was to be no superfluous gallantry between us.

RICHELIEU.

True; and though I am sometimes vehemently tempted to break the compact, and make violent love to you, you're such a capital friend that I verily believe I should lose by making you my mistress.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Your friend you certainly would; that's the common course of things you know.

RICHELIEU.

I thought D'Auvray was at Chantilly.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

So he is.

RICHELIEU.

I wonder what brings him here? Is he come officially, as lieutenant of my lord's marshals, to baulk some duel?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Not that I am aware of.

RICHELIEU.

Did he come alone?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

D'Aumont came with him.

RICHELIEU.

No, really—the dear D'Aumont—uncombed and unshaved as usual, I suppose? Upon my soul, he is the slovenliest nobleman in France!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

So, Paris would not let you go—and the five days for which you went grew into a whole week.

RICHELIEU.

Well, and was not a week little enough to pay my court to our young king, after my two years' dreary exile at Vienna?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, yes! And then, you know, you had to see Madame de Villars—Madame de Duras—Madame de Villeroy—Madame de Sabran—Madame de Mouchy—Mdlle. de Charolais—Madame de Soubise—Madame de—

RICHELIEU.

Upon my life it's true—I did n't think there were so many! But as so many duties compelled me to remain, I did not doubt that if anything of importance took place here, you would be good enough to write me a line. By the by, do you never write to anybody? It's curious enough that, in spite of our delightful intimacy, I haven't a line of your handwriting; I don't even know it by sight.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

That's rather an unadvised speech for a diplomatist, my lord. Can the favourite of a prime minister indulge in intimate correspondence?—especially with such an one as Monsieur de Richelieu! Handwriting is a dangerous thing in your grace's possession, sometimes, we know.

RICHELIEU.

And how goes it with your faithful adorer, D'Aumont?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Indeed I don't know whether it's love of me, but he certainly is half crazy.

RICHELIEU.

Oh! my dear lady, you wrong him, by half. But pray tell me; who is the young officer on guard down stairs this morning?—a protégé of your ladyship's?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Of mine, sir!

RICHELIEU.

Ah! don't look cross. I didn't mean to be rude or inquisitive, you know; only he's a devilish handsome fellow, that's all.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I believe he has lately been promoted, through the interest of the Duke de Bourbon.

RICHELIEU.

What's his name?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

D'Aubigny, I believe.

RICHELIEU.

D'Aubigny—D'Aubigny—good name—good family—people from Brittany, I think. Oh! but, by the by, my dear, delightful marchioness—talking of Brittany—I'm distractedly in love!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Indeed! What, again! Since when?

RICHELIEU.

Oh, since the day before yesterday! Now, just imagine the loveliest creature—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

It is n't absolutely necessary that I should hear her personal description, is it, my lord?

RICHELIEU.

Oh! no; not if it bores you. Well, however, she's from Brittany—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

And you met her—

RICHELIEU.

First, at the archbishop's — then, at the king's assembly.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh! I see; some new La Vallière.

RICHELIEU.

Not a bit of it—you're quite mistaken. A gentlewoman of high family, who has come to Paris, to solicit the freedom of her father and brothers, who are prisoners in the Bastile. The archbishop referred her to the king, and the king referred her to the Duke de Bourbon; so that she came here this very morning, an hour before I myself arrived.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

She is here?

RICHELIEU.

Yes! Isn't it charming?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, very; but what is to be the result of all this?

RICHELIEU.

'Pon my soul, that's more than I can tell—but I've a notion it may turn out pleasantly.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You have forgotten one thing, however—the name of your fair petitioner.

RICHELIEU.

Mademoiselle de Belle Isle.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

What, the granddaughter of Fouqué?

RICHELIEU.

The very same!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

But the father is compromised in that Le Blanc business, and the sons are accused of assassination.

RICHELIEU.

Lord bless us, yes—I know those things are said about people in order to get them into the Bastile;

the accusations are even believed as long as they are out of it; and when they are fairly trapped, they are left there, and the whole business is not only disbelieved, but never thought about by anyone again. I'll tell you what, my dear marchioness; I do n't know whether it is because I have twice been in the Bastile myself, but I really have a most sincere commiseration for those people who are sent there—particularly, the second time.

[*Enter a SERVANT.*

SERVANT.

Mademoiselle de Belle Isle!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Why do you announce visitors without knowing whether I choose to receive any one?

SERVANT.

Her ladyship had said this morning that—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, yes; but I did not wish to see everybody that came.

RICHELIEU.

Now, my dear, dear marchioness, I beseech you—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, certainly, I can refuse your grace nothing! Admit the lady.

RICHELIEU.

You're a perfect angel!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

My part in this business is a charming one, I must say!

SERVANT.

Mademoiselle de Belle Isle!

[*Enter* MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Madam!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Pray approach, mademoiselle!

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

How kind of you, madam, to receive me thus, upon my first presenting myself at your door!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I do not deserve your acknowledgments, mademoiselle; they are due to his Grace the Duke de Richelieu.

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

The Duke de Richelieu!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

He assured me that the business upon which you came was most pressing, and could not be postponed.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

A thousand thanks then, first to his grace. I had already been fortunate enough to find him on my way to Versailles, whose gates were opened to me by his influence; it seems that he is still my good angel at Chantilly; but let me also thank you, madam, whose gracious reception augurs so well for my success.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You must now tell me, in what I can be useful to you.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

My name has informed you who I am; and this intrusion must explain how urgent is the favour I solicit. My father, madam, and my two brothers, have now been prisoners three years in the Bastile; my father, the venerable head of a noble house, accused of fraud, embezzlement; my brothers, gentlemen and soldiers, implicated in a charge of murder. Oh, madam! you must see yourself at once, that these things cannot be true; and yet, for three long years have I remained alone to console and support my mother, vainly hoping that justice would, at last, be granted them. At length my mother died, and I found

myself alone in the wide world ; on one hand, a prison ; on the other, a grave ! Then, madam, I set forth alone to seek redress, under the safeguard of my misfortunes.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

And what was your intention ?

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

To see the Archbishop de Frejus ; to throw myself at the king's feet.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Well ?

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Well, madam, I have been denied redress alike by both ; by the archbishop, because he said, political affairs in no way concerned him ; by the king, who, engrossed by the pleasures of his age, is ignorant even of the existence of those who are persecuted in his name. At length I was sent hither, to present my petition to the Duke de Bourbon ; and I determined to appeal to you, madam—Why ? Because you are a woman ; because, terrified at my lonely and unprotected position, a stranger at court, and unused to all its observances, trembling at every moment lest I should commit some imprudence, or be guilty of some breach of etiquette, I felt as if I should be safe at once, could I but appeal to the feelings of a woman.

RICHELIEU.

And you were very right, madam ; her ladyship will do everything in her power for you, I dare be sworn.

SERVANT (*announcing*).

His Grace the Duke d'Aumont ! the Chevalier d'Auvray !

RICHELIEU.

The devil take them both !

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You see, madam, in spite of the interest which I cannot but feel for you, I am under the necessity of receiving company ; some other time we will resume this conversation.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Some other time ! Oh, madam ! shall I ever find you again thus gracious and condescending ? Good Heavens ! I have yet so much to urge, that would convince your mind and touch your heart ; who can assure me that I shall be permitted to see you even some other time, and that before to-morrow, the persecutors of my wretched family may not have made me an enemy in her, whom I implore to-day as my redeeming angel !

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Really, I am very much embarrassed ; I should be too happy to give you my undivided attention ; but—

RICHELIEU.

Well, my dear marchioness, there is one way of arranging this business; retire to your own apartment with mademoiselle, and I will receive these gentlemen.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Your grace is really too obliging; pray do the honours for me, and do you, mademoiselle, accompany me where we shall be uninterrupted.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Heaven surely inspired me when I sought you, madam; and Heaven will reward you both, for my poor thanks are all I have to offer.

[*Exit with MADAME DE VALCOUR.*]

RICHELIEU.

Nothing can be better! I release the father and the brothers from the Bastile; and as a good action is never unrewarded, I shall have my reward, or there's no such thing as justice extant. Show in the gentlemen! (*They come in*). Good morning, duke!

D'AUMONT.

Good morning!

RICHELIEU.

Ah! my dear chevalier! I have not seen you, I think, since the day when the Count Emanuel of Bavaria and

myself were just going to cut each other's throats, and you interfered, and arrested me—yes, faith, arrested me—and by order of our Lords Marshals of France. Here's my hand; I owe you no grudge for it.

D'AUVRAY.

You're of a forgiving disposition; and I can understand your owing me no grudge for saving you some ugly gash or other. But the question is, whether we shall forgive you for being here, tête-à-tête for the last hour with the marchioness, while we are not admitted even to kiss the hem of her petticoat.

D'AUMONT.

Pray, has she delegated her powers to you, and are you to treat with us instead of the fair lady?

RICHELIEU.

Precisely—and I shall profit by my present dignity, and give you, D'Aumont, a piece of advice.

D'AUMONT.

Well, what is it?

RICHELIEU.

Now, my dear fellow, it pleased God to make you a nobleman of the first family; it pleased the king to create you duke and peer of the realm; the Duchess of Orleans got your ribbon for you; your wife had you

made captain in the guards; I installed you knight of St. Louis, for by that same token, I had to kiss you at that august ceremony. Now, seeing that so much has been done for you by others, do, my dear fellow, shave your chin, and do something for yourself.

D'AUMONT.

What absurd stuff! This was the way we all wore our beards during the regency, and it was thought charming then; we have not changed, but the women have got some new freak in their heads about us. The devil take all fashions! Everybody has n't been blessed, like you, with the faculty of conforming to every whim of the hour; nobody but Fronsac could have become Richelieu. But I think even you will be puzzled to follow the prevailing fashion of the day—the improved morality of society, as our philosophers say.

RICHELIEU.

Pray, my dear D'Auvray, are our ladies really become so terribly virtuous as I am told they are?

D'AUVRAY.

It's incredible, but a most melancholy truth. Formerly, as you know, the universal custom was, that a woman had one confessor and two lovers at a time; now, would you believe it, they've reversed the fashion, and they have only one lover and two chaplains. It's really a frightful state of society!

RICHELIEU.

Oh ! come, nonsense ; you always take gloomy views of things.

D'AUMONT.

Upon my soul it's true ! He has it from the best authority, too—his own wife !

D'AUVRAY.

No, you mistake, D'Aumont, I had it from yours.

D'AUMONT.

Then it's sure to be true.

RICHELIEU.

How unfortunate I am, to be deprived of such authentic sources of information—wretched widower !

D'AUMONT.

You, a widower ! Why, when were you married ?

RICHELIEU.

So long ago, that I've almost forgotten it.

D'AUVRAY.

Where is your wife ?

RICHELIEU.

Um ! I don't exactly know. Sweet creature—lovely woman—died in her convent before we could even be

divorced. It's a melancholy story; I'll tell it you some other time.

SERVANT (*announcing*).

The Chevalier D'Aubigny.

RICHELIEU.

Aha! my young officer come to pay his court to the fair marchioness, too! Upon my word he's a good-looking chap, and I suspect—

D'AUMONT.

So you see, that as far as you're concerned, the very occupation of your life's gone; the bread's taken out of your mouth, as one may say, and I heartily advise you to return to Vienna, for you may depend upon it, there's nothing to be done here.

RICHELIEU.

Speak for yourselves, gentlemen.

D'AUVRAY.

Oh! we speak for all!

RICHELIEU.

That's a point upon which I am not at all so certain.

D'AUMONT.

Upon my soul, Richelieu, you have come back from Vienna a more impudent coxcomb than you went; the

women there have actually wrought that miracle upon you; you'd better go back there, believe me; the game's up here.

[*Enter MADAME DE VALCOUR with ROSANNE, followed by a servant, carrying her mass book.*]

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

A thousand pardons, gentlemen. I have been unexpectedly detained till now, and I really now must go to mass. To-morrow we have a ball at the palace, and shall be happy to see you all!

D'AUMONT.

Madam!

MADAME DE VALCOUR (*to RICHELIEU*).

Come back in an hour. I must speak with you.

RICHELIEU.

I shall not fail.

D'AUVRAY.

And does not your ladyship intend receiving us to-morrow morning, to console us, in some degree, for our ill-fortune to-day?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Impossible, my dear chevalier. I accompany the duke to Paris to-morrow morning, and shall only return in time for the ball.

RICHELIEU.

The Duke de Bourbon is invited to Rambouillet, to join the king's hunt, I understand.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, yes—he is in higher favour there than ever; the archbishop's scale is light, and threatens to kick the beam; so that we are still King of France.

ALL.

We kiss the hand of your majesty!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Come, Monsieur l'Abbé; how do you think I carry it?

ROSANNE.

Most wonderfully!

[They all kiss her hand: she courtesies, and goes out.]

D'AUVRAY.

Now, just look there! What were we telling you, Richelieu?—there goes Madame de Valcour to mass, with her priest on one side, and her prayerbook on the other. I declare the women are possessed with the devil of devotion.

RICHELIEU.

In spite of which—come now, a wager!

D'AUVRAY.

What is it?

RICHELIEU.

I'm in want of a thousand louis. D'Aumont is too miserly to lend them, you are too prodigal to have them; now, I'll win five hundred from each of you, in a fair wager.

D'AUMONT.

With all my heart!

D'AUVRAY.

And mine!

RICHELIEU.

You both insist that, during my absence, the women here have all become furiously virtuous?

D'AUMONT.

It is our sincere and very sad opinion.

RICHELIEU.

Very well! Now, mind, D'Aumont—mind, D'Auvray. I bet—I, Duke de Richelieu—that I will obtain a private interview of the very first maid, wife, or widow that we see, either here or as we leave the palace, and that within the next four-and-twenty hours.

D'AUVRAY.

Stop a bit; let's be precise, if you please; a love meeting?

RICHELIEU.

My dear fellow, I leave all other meetings to my men of business.

D'AUMONT.

A rendezvous, then.

RICHELIEU.

A rendezvous.

D'AUVRAY.

And where shall it take place?

RICHELIEU.

Why, in the lady's chamber, if you like.

D'AUMONT.

At what time?

RICHELIEU.

Midnight, if that suits you.

D'AUVRAY.

And how shall the thing be proved?

RICHELIEU.

Nothing easier in life—I'll throw a note out at the window myself to you.

D'AUMONT *and* D'AUVRAY.

Done!

RICHELIEU.

Now, you understand perfectly; a woman—the first maid, wife, or widow that we see, either in the palace, or as we leave it. Oh! on one condition, however; the lady must be handsome.

D'AUVRAY.

Oh, certainly!

D'AUMONT.

Here, look! look! look! Gentlemen! here comes a woman through the gallery!

[MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE *passes through the back of the stage.*]

RICHELIEU.

Mademoiselle de Belle Isle!

D'AUVRAY.

Aha! this does n't look so promising—eh, Richelieu?

D'AUMONT.

I'm afraid you do n't feel so sure of our money.

RICHELIEU.

Gentlemen, I shall win it, depend on't!

D'AUVRAY.

A thousand louis, then!

H H

D'AUBIGNY (*coming forward*).

One moment, gentlemen—I'll hold the stakes, if you please.

RICHELIEU.

You, sir?

D'AUBIGNY.

With your grace's permission.

D'AUMONT.

And why, may one ask?

D'AUBIGNY.

Because, gentlemen, I have a small interest in this wager too. In three days I was to marry that lady whom his grace of Richelieu has undertaken to dishonour within the four-and-twenty hours!

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE 1.

The same scene as in the First Act.

Enter MADAME DE VALCOUR and RICHELIEU.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

And you have laid such a wager?

RICHELIEU.

Even so!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

What madness!

RICHELIEU.

I've no reputation for wisdom to lose.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Your wager's lost, depend upon it!

RICHELIEU.

I have yet till to-morrow morning, at eleven o'clock ;
it's only now just five in the afternoon.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Who betted against you?—who held the stakes?

RICHELIEU.

I'll tell you all that when I've won. Now you must
keep your promise.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

What promise?

RICHELIEU.

To assist me in my undertaking.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Good Heavens! but if I could have conceived! however—

RICHELIEU.

Oh! no backing out. I depend upon you.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Well, you may do so.

RICHELIEU.

It's very strange; you say that in such an odd sort of way—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Dear me, what sort of way? Of course I shall keep my word.

RICHELIEU.

Well, good-bye. I'm off to reconnoitre my ground.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Where does she lodge?

RICHELIEU.

At the Sun; a good house, kept by a worthy old rascal, whose forefathers have plundered ours time

out of mind ; and who now treads in his ancestor's steps most conscientiously. I can make him do anything I please.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You will be back soon, for the Duke de Bourbon has despatches for you this morning.

RICHELIEU.

Oh, yes ; besides, I must tell you how the affair prospers. Adieu !

[*Exit.*

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

How the affair prospers ! I'm glad his grace has so fairly taken me into his alliance on this occasion, however. Depends upon me for assistance, too, as well as sympathy. At any rate, I can promise him quite as much of the one as the other.

[*Enter* MONSIEUR DE ROSANNE.

Well, what do you think of this wager ?

ROSANNE.

I am petrified at such cold-blooded profligacy. Doubtless, madam, you were unable to restrain your just indignation, and overwhelmed his grace with merited reproaches.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

So far from any such thing, my dear abbé, I listened to him with the most cordial interest; and have, moreover, promised to assist him with all my power.

ROSANNE.

Some indirectness may be pardoned in so difficult a situation as yours; but then, of course, you will warn this interesting young lady.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

No such thing! She *is* far too interesting, too innocent, too sacredly free from knowledge, or even suspicion of evil, to be shocked by any such revelations. No, she shall know none of the dangers that surround her, and yet she shall escape them all; or wit, courage, and cunning shall have forsaken me for ever. The duke shall lose his wager, my dear abbé; and that charming young creature shall never know of how vile an attempt she has been made the object. My spirit is roused alike by the difficulty of my enterprise and its interest. I promise you we shall obtain a glorious victory; and my scapegrace husband shall yet acknowledge that there are women in the world who are true to themselves and loyal to each other.

SERVANT.

Mademoiselle de Belle Isle.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, most fortunate! Show her in!

ROSANNE.

I leave you, my dear madam. You wear an air of triumph already, that makes me almost sure of your success. Heaven grant our hopes their full accomplishment! [Exit.

[Enter MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Come, my dear child!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Pardon this early intrusion, madam, but my anxiety is uncontrollable. Have you seen the Duke de Bourbon?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I have; but my application to him on your behalf was far from successful.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

O Heavens!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

The duke is strongly prejudiced, I am sorry to say, against your family.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Unfortunate that I am! O madam, would Heaven but inspire me with the power of convincing you!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I am convinced, my dear, already; but that is not the question. Monsieur de Bourbon, you see—Stay a moment; an idea occurs to me. There is a person, who has the greatest influence over him, who, if he would but take up your affair, I am sure would succeed in carrying it through triumphantly.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh! who? where? how can I find this person? Tell me, that I may fly—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You need not fly, child, he is here at Chantilly. But, by the by, what am I thinking of? You know him; it is Monsieur de Richelieu.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Then, indeed, I am sure of success! his goodness to me at Versailles and here, madam, this morning, if you remember, the extreme kindness of his manner—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, yes, I remember. Well, your best way will be to write to him.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

How very fortunate ! I have had the very same idea myself. You advise me to write to him, madam, and I have already done so.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Bless me ! Have you sent the letter ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh, no, madam ! I have brought it to you, to request you to look at it ; to ask you whether you think it proper that I should solicit an interview with Monsieur de Richelieu.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

(*Aside*)—Charming creature ! I am half in love with my own rival ! (*Aloud*)—Certainly, my dear child ; the sacredness of your motive shields you from all ill interpretation.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I thought it might do so, madam.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Besides, you may, if you please, appoint him here, in this very apartment.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh ! if you would but permit it ? Where can I send to him ? O madam ! how kind, how good, how considerate you are !

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

But, bless me ! how came I not to think of it before ? how inconsiderate I have been ! You are alone at Chantilly, I think you told me ?

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Alas, madam, quite alone !

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Staying at an hotel, alone ! Why, my dear, that is in itself a most objectionable situation for a young woman of family. You cannot possibly stay alone in an hotel.

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Alas, madam, I know nobody at Chantilly.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Forgetful !—except myself. Now, when I undertake a business, my dear, it is my principle to see it through, and that successfully, too. I have pledged myself to your cause, and I am determined to gain it for you ! And, as the first step in the matter, we will besiege Monsieur de Bourbon. I will introduce the enemy into the citadel ; you shall lodge here.

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What have I done to deserve so much kindness ? I, who trembled at the bare thought of demanding

your protection. But, indeed, my dear madam, I cannot put you to so much inconvenience.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Inconvenience! nonsense, child! You shall have these two rooms and the small library adjoining; I shall simply install myself in the suite of apartments beyond, that's all; and we shall be next door to each other, and excellent neighbours I am sure.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh, madam! Good Heavens! If you could but know what balm your kindness pours into my heart. Oh! I feel so sure, so sure that if you but will it, all things will turn out fortunately for me!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I hope I have made a good beginning; and when we are once fairly leagued, and side by side, it shall go hard, my fair petitioner, if we do not repair all past misfortunes and prevent all future ones. But let us lose no time; return to your hotel, and have all your things brought here immediately.

[*She rings; MARIETTE enters.*

See if one of the carriages is ready; go with mademoiselle to her lodging, and remain to assist her. In the meantime, my dear, I shall send your note to the duke.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

How can I thank you? (*Attempts to kiss her hand.*)

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Nonsense! What are you about? (*Kisses her forehead.*) You will find me here when you come back.

[*Exit* MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE
ISLE and MARIETTE.

Upon my word, I know nothing half so imprudent, as a young girl's gratitude. By simply changing two words in this letter, Monsieur de Richelieu, with the excellent opinion he has of himself, would presently discover what certainly was never meant in it. My dear husband, you were gallantly complaining just now that you did not know my handwriting; so much the better, for we shall very probably have a long correspondence together, under cover of Mademoiselle de Belle Isle. I shall go and rewrite this dangerous epistle forthwith.

[*Exit.*

[*Enter* RICHELIEU.

RICHELIEU.

My tavern-keeper is either stupid, or, what's worse, honest! I'm not sure that he understood me; or he is an accomplished assumer of innocence. If I only knew her room, there might be some condemned door; the greatest conveniences in life are those same condemned doors. By the by, I wonder if our gay marchioness knows

anything of the pass behind the tapestry that Monsieur de Bourbon so ingeniously contrived for himself, years ago, in this very room. Let's see—let's see—the marchioness is a very strange woman! Hereabouts, I think it was, and—though the acknowledged favourite of the prime minister—or hereabouts, or—and a woman of decided talent, she does not seem to take half the advantage of her admirable position that she might, and many women would; for instance, this secret door—where the devil is it?

[Enter MADAME DE VALCOUR.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

My dear duke, what are you about with my poor old tapestry?

RICHELIEU.

(*Aside*)—I wonder, now, if she *does* know of the door? she looks so confoundedly unconscious! (*Aloud*) Nothing, oh, nothing! I was admiring this part of the work—Gobelins, magnificent! But, my dear marchioness, I am in high spirits!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Well, come; I will put you in still better humour. Mademoiselle de Belle Isle has just left me. She had been looking everywhere for you, and not finding you, requested me to give you this note.

RICHELIEU.

Good gracious, you amaze me! What does she want?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I rather think an interview with you.

RICHELIEU.

How very lucky ! I was about to ask one with her.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You see good fortune flies to meet you.

RICHELIEU.

And to whom am I indebted for this happy chance ?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, to your own merit, of course ! In the first place, then, I rather think she has been told that you had great influence with Monsieur de Bourbon, and she wants you to employ it in her behalf.

RICHELIEU.

Too happy, 'pon my life, to do anything for her ; and, do you know, I have spoken to him about the business already, but I found him very ill-disposed about it.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Will you excuse me one moment. I am going to give this room up to a friend, and must have some measures taken about it.

RICHELIEU.

Don't mind me, my dear marchioness !

[*Exit* MADAME DE VALCOUR.]

And now let 's see what Mademoiselle de Belle Isle has to

say to me ! (*Reads*)—‘Would his Grace the Duke de Richelieu have the condescension to bestow upon Mademoiselle de Belle Isle, at his earliest convenience, the favour of a few moments’ conversation?’—The favour will be mine—mine—charming creature ! Upon my soul, these rustic beauties have the loveliest simplicity of style !—‘Mademoiselle de Belle Isle ventures to hope that she has not reckoned in vain upon his grace’s kind protection ; in return for which she promises him boundless gratitude.’—It’s a bargain, my charming petitioner ! You shall have my protection, and I your boundless gratitude ! Let’s see—let’s see. Somehow, this note is written in a remarkably clear and steady hand ! Um ! um ! there’s something in Madame de Valcour’s manner, too, in all this business, which seems to me rather suspicious. Stop a bit, Richelieu, my friend ; don’t be taken in if you can help it ! The marchioness gave me this note ; let us make sure that Mademoiselle de Belle Isle really wrote it. Here she is ! Why, damn it, the girl’s seized with a trembling at sight of me !

[*Enter MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.*

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Pardon me, my lord duke, but I cannot command the emotion which your présence excites in me.

RICHELIEU.

And how may I interpret this emotion, madam ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

'Tis most natural, and easily to be accounted for, my lord. I cannot look upon you without thinking that you are, perhaps, the man destined to end all my misfortunes. Can it be chance alone that seems to have brought you back from Vienna, as it were, on purpose to assist me, first at Versailles, and now at Chantilly? The unfortunate are apt to be superstitious, my lord; and perhaps you yourself are not exempt from some slight belief in presentiments.

RICHELIEU.

I believe in them firmly, and have done so, particularly for the last three days; and shall be cruelly disappointed if mine do not prove true.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

The marchioness was good enough, I believe, to deliver a note to your grace.

RICHELIEU.

Which, she informed me, was from you. I am infinitely obliged to Madame de Valcour—for, of course, she suggested to you the idea of applying to me.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

No, my lord duke—I will be candid with you. I had thought of addressing your grace before I spoke to her.

You must blame yourself for my importunity. I could not believe that you would refuse to fulfil hopes which your own gracious condescension excited. Ah! my lord, you are all powerful here—you know the object of my entreaties—the freedom of my father and my brothers; the salvation of a noble family is in your hands.

RICHELIEU.

No exertion shall be wanting on my part, believe it, madam, in order that your filial devotion may find its just reward. But you mistake; I am not all powerful here, and what you demand depends upon a higher will than mine. I can but be the mediator between beauty and power; but give me a written memorial of your petition—write it yourself, even as you speak, with the same enchanting eloquence of feeling, the same irresistible soul, and I will present it myself to the Duke de Bourbon this very day.

[*Enter* FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN.

The despatches which his grace was waiting for are ready.

RICHELIEU.

A thousand pardons, I must leave you for an instant. Here is everything necessary for writing—sit down and draw up your petition; in three minutes I will return for it.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

How shall I ever thank you as I ought?

RICHELIEU.

By allowing me the title of your friend.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh! my lord duke.

RICHELIEU.

Write, my dear madam, write! The devil's in it if I don't find out so, whether she wrote that note, or not.

[Exeunt DUKE and FOOTMAN.]

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Good heavens! how deceived have I been in my notion of the court! How was I warned, that I should meet with nothing but envy, malice, and wickedness! I have only yet applied to two persons, and one is as a dear friend, and the other as a brother to me.

[Enter MADAME DE VALCOUR.]

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

What are you doing, child?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh! is it you?—You see, I am making out a memorial to the prime minister, by the direction of Monsieur de Richelieu, who is coming back for it immediately, and has undertaken to present it himself.

•

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

(*Aside*)—Oho! he suspects something, I see. (*Aloud*)—Let me see, my dear, how you set about it. Oh! this will never do. There are certain forms of expression, usual in these sort of petitions—here, get up—I'll do it for you.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Are you not afraid, madam, that the Duke de Bourbon may recognize your hand?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Well, child, suppose he does, do you think that is likely to injure your cause? Come, give me your place! Now, what are your father's names?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Charles Louis Auguste de Fouqué.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

His titles?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Duke of Gisors, Marquis of Belle Isle, Earl Vernon and Andelys.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

What is your brothers' rank?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

One is captain, and the other, lieutenant in the king's service.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

How long have they been in confinement?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

My father, for three years; my brothers, for the last fifteen months.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Very good; we will set all these poor prisoners free, depend upon it!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

O madam, God grant you may speak true!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Now, my dear, there is your petition, properly drawn up.

[*Enter* MARIETTE.

MARIETTE.

Mademoiselle de Belle Isle's bedchamber is entirely ready, madam, whenever she chooses to take possession of it.

[*Exit.*

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Very well.

[*Enter RICHELIEU; he stops at the door.*

RICHELIEU.

Together—humph!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

The duke! (*sits down and reads.*)

RICHELIEU.

A thousand pardons! I am afraid I have kept you waiting—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

No excuses, my lord, pray; the petition is but this moment finished, and now if you will take charge of it—

RICHELIEU.

Certainly. (*Aside—looking at it*)—The same handwriting—the note was from her! (*Aloud*)—I hope, madam, you will permit me to come and inform you, to-day, of the success our petition meets with?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You must ask the marchioness, sir; it is her permission you must obtain, since she has been good enough to give me a lodging in the palace as long as I remain in Chantilly. She actually has had the goodness to give up her own apartment to me.

RICHIELEU.

Aha!—really!—indeed! So, marchioness, the friend you were expecting—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Was Mademoiselle de Belle Isle, my dear duke! You must perceive, I am sure, at once, yourself, how extremely improper, and even imprudent, it was for a young lady in her position, alone and unprotected, to remain at an hotel.

RICHIELEU.

Oh, certainly, certainly—and you were quite right, my dear lady, and it really is very kind and considerate of you. But I hope I may be permitted, nevertheless, to inform Mademoiselle de Belle Isle of the fate of my attempts in her favour.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Bless me! of course; she is at home here, and I hope will feel herself so, and receive you whenever she thinks proper.

RICHIELEU.

Then, madam, I entreat that favour once more of you.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Come when you will, sir; your grace will ever be looked for as a friend, and welcomed as a benefactor.

RICHELIEU.

I may not be able to see the Duke de Bourbon till rather late—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE

I have watched through many a night of tears and terror; believe me, it will cost me little to watch for once in hope and happy expectation.

RICHELIEU.

This evening, then, madam, I shall wait upon you.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

This evening, sir, I shall look for you most anxiously.

RICHELIEU.

It is possible that what I may have to repeat to you would be better confided to yourself alone.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE

My lord duke, I will take care to be alone.

RICHELIEU.

You are too charming!

[MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE *goes into the bed-room.*

MADAME DE VALCOUR (*aside*).

I wonder how many wives would have sat quietly

through such an assignation? I positively cannot but admire my own heroism and self-command. A modern fine lady is your only stoic.

RICHELIEU.

So, so, marchioness! this is the way you keep the promise you made me of remaining neuter in this business; you defeat my very first plan.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

A plan founded on the rascality of a tavern-keeper—fie! it really was too easy, and would have disgraced your generalship. Here, now, 't is quite another matter—there can be neither surprise nor treachery, and your grace will be compelled to obtain, for it will be impossible to steal, the lady's favour; nor have I the slightest doubt in the world of your obtaining it, my dear duke!

RICHELIEU.

Nor I either, to tell you the truth, my dear marchioness, provided only that your ladyship will fight fairly, as I do.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

And pray what do you demand, as fair fighting, of me?

RICHELIEU.

That you will keep my secret, in the first place; that, at ten o'clock, you will leave Mademoiselle de

Belle Isle; and that, in short, from ten o'clock till midnight, Mademoiselle de Belle Isle will be left entirely alone.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

For me, she most certainly will—for I am going to Paris this evening myself, and shall therefore be entirely out of the way of interfering with any of your plans. But I must now, if you please, state two conditions in this agreement.

RICHELIEU.

Nothing can be fairer!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You will employ no servant of the palace in the business; you will have recourse to no drugs or opiates, as it is whispered you have done, more than once, on such occasions, my lord duke; and these points acceded to on your part, I leave your grace an open field, and my best wishes—(*aside*)—for your defeat, which I will take care to make certain!

RICHELIEU.

You have my word to all this, and I wish your ladyship a pleasant drive to court!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You still persist in your plan, then, though I have passed over to the enemy?

RICHELIEU.

I think more desperate battles have been won.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

And against better generals, no doubt?

RICHELIEU.

By no means; I do not say that; for in you, my dear marchioness, I am perfectly aware that I have to encounter youth combined with experience.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

(*Aside*)—That would be bitter if it were true!

(*Aloud*)—Farewell, till to-morrow evening, then.

[MADAME DE VALCOUR *curtseys to him, and goes out.*

RICHELIEU.

She does *not* know of the secret door, that's quite clear; and I have nothing to do but rummage certain reminiscences, to find my way to it once more. How droll, now, that a clever woman should live, as she has done, close to such an inestimable contrivance, and be none the better for it! The marchioness is a handsome woman—a very handsome woman!—in fact, the wager aside, she's a devilish deal better worth besieging than even this pretty girl. She pretends to be a prude, too, and that's always rare sport! Faith, I half think she must be something of the kind, never to have discovered

this—ha! here it is! and no more fastening than a few minutes' perseverance will suffice to make away with—excellent, i' faith! And now, my two fair antagonists, I think your defeat was certainly laid down in your horoscope—for, 'pon my soul, I do n't see how you can avoid it! [Exit.

[Enter MADAME DE VALCOUR and MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

My dear child, I have been thinking very seriously of the tedious course of solicitation, which, I am afraid, you will be compelled to resort to in this sad business.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

O madam, my patience shall be proof against everything.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Poor thing! how much this courageous resignation touches me! Is it long since you have seen your old father?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Alas! three years; not once since he was thrown into prison.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Three years! And you have never demanded permission to be admitted to him?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh, madam, I have besought, entreated, supplicated in vain—in vain! Can you conceive such cruelty? To refuse a child admission to her wretched father's prison! All those whom I wearied with my prayers doubtless had no children, or they must have felt for me.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Umph! You would rejoice to see your father once again?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

O Heavens!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

And if any one procured you that happiness, they might depend upon your secrecy?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Good God! what are you saying? What hope do you venture to suggest? What—I—I might behold my father once again; enter, when he least expected it, his prison door; at the very moment, perhaps, when he was thinking of me, far away; I might throw myself in his arms, crying out, 'Father, it is I! dear, dear father, it is your child—your Gabrielle!' Oh, speak—speak, for pity's sake! On my knees I implore you, what shall I do to obtain this joy, this blessing?

MADAME DE VALCOUR (*raising her*).

Listen; take heed that we are dealing now with matters of the utmost weight and danger. The Governor of the Bastile is my devoted friend, and I can give you a letter for him—

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

A letter; yes—yes; and with that letter—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You shall see your father again. It will take you less than two hours and a half to go to Paris. You will set off at ten, you will arrive at a little after midnight, you will remain till three in the morning with M. de Belle Isle, and you will be back here before any one in the palace is stirring.

MADMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What! to-day—to-night—this very night—I shall see my father, whom I have not seen for three whole years? O Heaven, support me! I feel as if the sudden shock of happiness would drive me mad.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

But now attend; and, mark me, all this can only be on one most solemn condition. Remember what I am doing for you. I take upon myself to open to you a state prison, which uncloses its gates at the voice of the prime minister or the king's signet alone. I have done

this for no human being but yourself. Monsieur de Bourbon must remain ignorant of it ; jealous as he is of his authority, he would never forgive my assumption of it in such a matter. Monsieur de Belle Isle's imprisonment is of the strictest, the severest kind ; his liberty hereafter, perhaps his life, depends upon your secrecy.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Great God ! his life ?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Yes, his life ; therefore swear to me now that, as long as Monsieur de Bourbon remains prime minister, you will confide to no soul alive that you have seen your father—that you have this night even left the palace. Think, take time, reflect before you engage yourself.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Madam, I swear by everything most holy, by my father's life, and by my own soul, that never while Monsieur de Bourbon remains prime minister shall any living creature know that I have seen my father, or even left the palace this night.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Enough ! Hold yourself ready to go at a moment's warning. I shall immediately order a carriage to be brought round for you, and, at six o'clock in the morning, you must be back by the little postern gate of the park.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

How have I deserved this goodness?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I sincerely feel for you, pity, and admire you, my dear child. In a few moments all will be prepared, and I will come myself for you.

[*Exit.*

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I shall see him again—to-night—this very night, my father, my dear, dear father!

SERVANT (*announcing*).

Monsieur le Chevalier d'Aubigny.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

D'Aubigny! and for the first time in my life I have a secret that I may not share with him. Show him in.

[*Enter D'AUBIGNY.*

Dear Henry!

D'AUBIGNY.

What good fortune has befallen you, Gabrielle? You look beaming with joy!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

My heart is full of hope, Henry; for since my arrival here, all things seem to combine to favour and forward

my wishes. Oh! we shall save my father, we shall save my brothers, and the happiness of our love will be made perfect, by their freedom. Thank Heaven by your cheerfulness, instead of accusing it by your despondency. As for me, I can tell you no more; but I pray, I believe, and I hope.

D'AUBIGNY.

'T is sad that when you are so full of happy confidence, I should be chilled with cold misgivings. You look at everything through the medium of hope, and I, through that of fear. You speak of all these fortunate circumstances, which you say impart this cheerful faith to you—in me, they awaken nothing but suspicion and mistrust. You think them ordered by a beneficent Providence; I tremble lest they should be the result of evil human machinations. It may be morbid feeling, an infirmity, but, Gabrielle, 't is an infirmity as painful and as pitiable, believe me, as a real misfortune.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry, you are ungrateful to Providence; just now, too, above all.

D'AUBIGNY.

And what has Providence done for you now, Gabrielle?—tell me that? God knows, I desire nothing half so much as to hope. On whom do you place your dependence for happier days and brighter prospects?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

On Madame de Valcour, in the first place, whose kindness and tenderness towards me are more those of a sister even than a friend. Why, you see yourself that she has not allowed me to remain at an hotel—a mother could hardly be more anxiously careful of her daughter.

D'AUBIGNY.

I cannot help it, Gabrielle, these painful impressions are not always to be controlled, even by reason. Have you mentioned our engagement to Madame de Valcour?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

No! Is it not a secret?

D'AUBIGNY.

True, true! But tell me, have you seen no one but the marchioness to-day?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh, yes, Henry, I have; a person on whose influence I reckon even more than Madame de Valcour.

D'AUBIGNY.

May I know the name of this person?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Of course, that is no secret—'tis the Duke de Richelieu.

D'AUBIGNY.

The Duke de Richelieu !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What is the matter ? Good gracious !

D'AUBIGNY.

The Duke de Richelieu ! And so you have seen him to-day ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Why, he has hardly left the palace all day.

D'AUBIGNY.

And what was he doing here, pray ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I believe he was engaged in particular business with Monsieur de Bourbon.

D'AUBIGNY.

Are you to see him again ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Yes. I expect him to bring me some account of a measure he intended taking about my petition.

D'AUBIGNY.

Gabrielle !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Heavens ! you terrify me.

D'AUBIGNY.

Do you know this man to whom you have ventured to address yourself ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I know him as everybody knows him. Who does not know the Duke de Richelieu ?

D'AUBIGNY.

And knowing him, can you hope that the protection he is now granting you is disinterested ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry—perhaps I am to blame—but I must confess, I cannot thus see nothing but evil in what appears un-mixed good. Monsieur de Richelieu has hitherto dealt by me as a sincere friend ; should he assume any other manner towards me, I presume that you have sufficient confidence in me to feel assured that, all powerful as his grace's interest is, I shall relinquish all claim to it from the moment that I perceive it might compromise my honour, or a name which I am about to exchange for yours.

D'AUBIGNY.

Your innocence, Gabrielle, blinds you to this man's real character : the whitest virtue has been blackened

but breathed on by his love; no fame survives unstained his contaminating touch; his evil determination once taken, he leaves no means unattempted to obtain his object; and some of the means that he has dared to use might have cost dear to men less powerful than that wicked man! Gabrielle, you see my agony; have pity on me!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What must I do? Speak, speak, Henry! anything, everything you wish—

D'AUBIGNY.

Promise me not to receive the duke here, this evening—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I promise you!

D'AUBIGNY.

Not to meet him anywhere else—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I promise you!

D'AUBIGNY.

Gabrielle, I depend upon your word.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry, you are right to do so.

D'AUBIGNY.

If you were to break it, you do not know—you cannot conceive the misery that would fall upon us both.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

How!

D'AUBIGNY.

I cannot explain myself; but you have promised me—you *do* promise me, that you will not see the Duke de Richelieu to-night, do you not?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I have promised it. I *do* promise it,—are you satisfied?

D'AUBIGNY.

Yes.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Then, Henry, leave me.

D'AUBIGNY.

So soon!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

It is late—

D'AUBIGNY.

'T is hardly ten o'clock—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I have some letters to write. I am weary; and besides, is it fitting, for my sake, that you should stay later here?

D'AUBIGNY.

You were to have received the Duke de Richelieu if he had come—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

The Duke de Richelieu is a stranger, an indifferent person; I do not love the Duke de Richelieu, and I do love you, Henry.

D'AUBIGNY.

You love me, and you dismiss me thus, when without the slightest impropriety I might remain with you an hour yet—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

An hour—it's impossible, Henry! Leave me, I beseech you!

D'AUBIGNY.

You beseech me to go away! Good God! what is going on—what is the matter, what has happened?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Nothing is going on, nothing has happened, nothing is the matter. Is it, then, so very, very strange, that after travelling all night, and a day of anxiety and fatigue, I should wish to take some repose? Can it be possible that you are jealous Henry? Why, of whom—of what? I never saw you thus, before. There, there, there—it is actually striking ten o'clock!

D'AUBIGNY.

I leave you, madam.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Madam ! Ah, that was cruel ! You find me hopeful, happy—and as you are not used to see me thus, my unaccustomed cheerfulness alarms you, and you would fain make me sad again—sad, as you have always seen me. 'Tis easily done, believe me ! One word, one tone from you, one look of doubt, or of distress ; see, Henry, I am as sad as you could wish to make me. Are you satisfied ?

D'AUBIGNY.

Pardon, Gabrielle, pardon ! I love you so that I dare not believe my own happiness. I dread lest anything should come between us, should disunite us. Forgive me, I am going.—I am wrong !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

To-morrow, Henry—

D'AUBIGNY.

At what time to-morrow will you see me ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

As early as you like—at eight o'clock.

D'AUBIGNY.

Good night, good night ! You will not see the duke ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE

No ! no ! go in peace.

D'AUBIGNY.

Farewell !

[*Exit*

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

He is gone, at length ! How hard to send him thus away without telling him what made me so happy. Madam ! madam !

[*Enter* MADAME DE VALCOUR.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Now then, here is the letter—the horses are to—the carriage is at the door.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE

Which way must I go ?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Follow Mariette ! Remember, the most profound secrecy !—and farewell, my dear child !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Heaven bless and reward you !

[*Runs out*

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

'T is something to have saved that gentle and innocent creature from even a knowledge of the foul machinations by which she was threatened. She is gone at length—a quarter after ten—it was high time. I am sure my husband must be already on his way hither; let us take all due precautions against his entrance. (*Rings—a Servant enters.*) Fasten the shutters of that window! And yet he does not care for this girl, I know he does not; but, like the wanton child, seizing a butterfly and throwing it the next moment from him, maimed and defaced, he pursues this wager for the sole gratification of his senseless vanity, careless alike of her present feelings or her future fate! (*To Servant*)—Do you see anyone in the street?

SERVANT.

Yes, my lady; a man, wrapped in a cloak.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

A cloak in June!—it must be he. Fasten the window. Mademoiselle de Belle Isle is very nervous; you will sit up all night in the anteroom, and you will admit nobody till to-morrow morning. (*Servant goes out.*) Very good. For further security, let us bolt the doors; there are the chimneys, to be sure, but they are grated at the top.

SERVANT (*speaking through the door*).

The Duke de Richelieu is coming up the great staircase, my lady.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Say that nobody is up.—(*Listening.*)

SERVANT (*without*).

Yes, your grace, everybody has retired.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Excellent; he retires too. We shall, no doubt, soon hear something at that window. Now, my dear husband, I have kept faith with you, and you have nothing to complain of. I have not betrayed you to Mademoiselle de Belle Isle; I left her at ten o'clock, and from ten o'clock till midnight she will most certainly be alone—on the king's highway, 'tis true—but then it is your business to follow, and find her there. But hark! what noise was that from behind the tapestry?—footsteps!—the opening of a door! Heavens! there is a secret entrance to the chamber, and he knows it.—(*blows out the candles.*)

[*Enter* RICHELIEU.]

RICHELIEU.

When one door is shut in your face, the only way is to come in by some other.

MADAME VALCOUR (*aside*).

What shall I do—what will become of me? If I call for help, the house will be roused. Was ever woman, was ever wife in so strange a position? I have but one course—to be silent. At least, he *is* my husband!

RICHELIEU.

What a capital thing is a good memory! Faith, the private staircase and the secret door don't seem to have been much used lately; they're confoundedly dirty and out of repair. However, here we are, safe and sound. All is dark and still—nothing could be better. I have taken the precaution of writing my note beforehand. As I came by, I passed a fellow wrapped in a cloak, lurking close under the wall—no doubt my friend D'Aubigny! (*Clock strikes.*) Half-past ten. He is at his post, and I at mine. And now to fulfil the conditions of our wager. (*Opens window softly.*) Hallo! you sir, in the cloak there! Look ye—have the kindness to step this way, if you please. There—that'll do. If you should happen to be acquainted with the Chevalier D'Aubigny, have the goodness to deliver this note to him from the Duke de Richelieu—there it is! (*Throws note from window, and closes shutters.*) I met the marchioness's carriage on the way—she's off to Paris. Mademoiselle de Belle Isle is by this time alone; so now or never!

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

The same scene as in the previous Acts.

D'AUBIGNY and a FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN.

But bless me, sir, 'tis only seven o'clock, and not a soul in the house is up yet!

D'AUBIGNY.

Never mind—I tell you, I will go in—I will speak to Mademoiselle de Belle Isle as soon as she rises! (*Footman goes out.*) Can he be here still?—I watched till daybreak, but have not seen him come. Gracious God! it seems all like a dream, a hideous dream!—but no—'t is all but too true—here is the very chamber where I left her, yesterday—the window, out of which he threw his infernal boast—the street, where I received it—Merciful Heavens! can I believe my own senses?—Gabrielle deceive me thus infamously! Oh, no—no—no—it is—it must be impossible!

[*Enter MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.*

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Dear Henry! I heard your voice, and made haste to come to you.

D'AUBIGNY.

So early up!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You said, last night, that you would come early.

D'AUBIGNY.

True—but—but—how comes it that, last night, you were so anxious to have me gone, and that, this morning, you are so eager to receive me?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

So, you have not forgotten that yet, Henry?

D'AUBIGNY.

No! one cannot always banish painful impressions, at will—and that idea has tormented me throughout the night.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Tormented you—what idea?

D'AUBIGNY.

Oh—why, the recollection of that excessive fatigue of yours, which made you so earnestly desire my absence.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You answer me very strangely this morning, Henry! you seem troubled—displeased. What is it, dearest—what ails you—tell me?

D'AUBIGNY.

Nothing—nothing—I cannot address the same remark to you. Your face wears an expression of joy, of happiness; perhaps you have fresh reasons for hope this morning.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh, yes, if dreams may be supposed to augur anything, mine have presaged me happiness this night. I dreamt that a beneficent spirit bore me on his wings to the gates of the Bastile, which flew open before me. I beheld my father, he pressed me on his heart, he folded me in his arms, he rained kisses on my head, he spoke to me of you, dearest Henry—of our marriage, so long, so sadly deferred, and he comforted himself in his captivity, with the thought that I should soon have in you a friend and a protector. Oh! you see, dear love, 't was a wonderful dream, and one that even now, awake as I am, fills my mind with the happiest hopes.

D'AUBIGNY.

I, too, had a dream last night, but a less happy one than yours, Gabrielle.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Is it that, that makes you so sad this morning?

D'AUBIGNY.

Perhaps, for I dreamt that yesterday, I had no sooner left you, than, in spite of your solemn promise to me, you did receive the Duke de Richelieu here!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What do you mean?

D'AUBIGNY.

Nothing; you have told me your dream, and I am telling you mine, that's all.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Well, what then?—

D'AUBIGNY.

It seemed to me, still in my dream, that I was standing in the street, opposite to that window, when the window was thrown open, and a man appeared on the balcony, and threw out to me a note; but, stranger than all, and which causes my dream to leave even a deeper impression of reality than yours, perhaps, is, that on waking, that note, that very note was in my hand, Gabrielle: and here it is.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

And here it is?

D'AUBIGNY.

Read it.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE (*reads*).

‘It is eleven at night, I am in Mademoiselle de Belle Isle’s apartment: I will tell you to-morrow at what hour I left it.

DUKE DE RICHELIEU.’

What does that mean?

D'AUBIGNY.

It means, madam, that Monsieur de Richelieu, yesterday morning, as you passed through the gallery, laid an infamous wager, which he has won.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I don't understand you.

D'AUBIGNY.

Then I will make myself understood. You promised not to receive Monsieur de Richelieu; you did receive him, he came last night, after I had left you; Monsieur de Richelieu was with you, in this room; Monsieur de Richelieu opened that window, and out of that window threw this note! Now, do you understand?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What are you talking about?

D'AUBIGNY.

What you know quite as well as I do—only what you did *not* know is, that I was aware of all—that I was there, under that window, till break of day, waiting to see him come out; for your honour is yet too dear for me to leave such a secret in the possession of another man besides myself. Ah! that was why you were so agitated and confused yesterday evening—that was why you were so anxious, so earnest to have me gone; that

was why you wished so very particularly to be left alone—alone! I have passed the whole night wandering round the palace—for if I could but have found a door, a window open, any avenue that might have led to you, I would have murdered you both—yes, both—you, and your lover with you, though you had dragged yourself on your knees at my very feet for mercy.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You must be mad to utter such things to me. I received Monsieur de Richelieu after you had left me! Monsieur de Richelieu passed the night here!—Why, can I believe my ears?—my eyes? Are you the Chevalier d'Aubigny? Am I Mademoiselle de Belle Isle? Is it you—you, Henry, who speak thus to me, your betrothed—to me, who, in three days, shall bear your name? I can't believe my senses!

D'AUBIGNY.

I could not believe my senses—I thought my very eyes deceived me. Yes, Gabrielle, yes, such was my deep reliance on your truth, that I should have disbelieved my eyes, and doubted still; but this paper—this paper is no illusion. Gabrielle, how will you account for this?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What can I say to you? I *can't* account for it, even to myself! Some one must have entered this apartment without my knowing it.

D'AUBIGNY.

Without your knowing it! A man can have entered this room, without your hearing him! Which way? Who admitted him? The doors are carefully watched—even now, it was with difficulty that I obtained entrance. O Gabrielle! Gabrielle! *I* will account for this—*I* will tell you what has happened. Your love for your father has made you forget your love for me; you saw before you two men, of whom one had in his power your father's liberty—the other had nothing but his own life to offer you. The man of influence sold his protection to you at a certain price.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Sir!

D'AUBIGNY.

Gabrielle, I accuse you of nothing—you are not, you cannot be, guilty. I only say that you did not dare refuse the duke the meeting he solicited. I say—I only say, that you did consent to receive him—perhaps—and in some moment, when you may have left the room, he wrote this note, and threw it from the window. That's all, Gabrielle—that's all—confess that—say it was so—say so, and I forgive you.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Thank you for that word, Henry; thank you for these suggestions of your love; for I see that you love

me so much, that you are striving to deceive yourself—but I cannot confess what you require of me. If, after the sacred promise that I gave you, I had consented to see Monsieur de Richelieu, I should be infamous. But, believe me, he solicited no meeting; I granted him none. I have not seen him, I tell you so again, and I have the simplest means in my power of proving what I say.

D'AUBIGNY.

What means?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

This note is from the duke, you say?

D'AUBIGNY.

He threw it to me from the window himself.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I shall send immediately for Monsieur de Richelieu; you will conceal yourself there—I shall receive him here; you will not lose a single syllable of what passes between us; and if Monsieur de Richelieu has seen my face since yesterday evening at eight o'clock, then—why then, Henry—you shall think of me as vilely as you please.

D'AUBIGNY.

Oh! dearest, I had not dared to ask this much of you—but since you offer it, I accept the means of clearing up this infamous mystery, which baffles me.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE

Calm yourself ; the mystery shall be cleared up, believe me. Only, Henry, remember, not a motion—not a word—that might betray your concealment.

D'AUBIGNY.

Oh, fear me not !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Madman !

D'AUBIGNY.

No, no ; I am convinced. I do not doubt thee—no—'t is impossible, with that angelic voice—those lovely eyes—no, no—you cannot tell a falsehood. I believe thee, dearest, dearest !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You will believe me better still when I shall have sent for the duke.

SERVANT (*announces*).

The Duke de Richelieu !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

'Tis Heaven sends him at this moment ! Show him in ! And do you enter that chamber—and, above all, remember your promise, Henry, to be silent.

D'AUBIGNY.

Your hand, Gabrielle !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

My hand—you deserve—

D'AUBIGNY.

Give me your hand!

[*He kisses her hand, and goes into her room.* RICHELIEU *enters.*

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You come upon a wish, my lord duke.

RICHELIEU.

Hail to my fairest! I came indeed, but almost without a hope of being admitted thus early.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Sir, I was about to send for you.

RICHELIEU (*attempting to kiss her hand*).

Ah! you are too, too gracious!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

My lord duke—

RICHELIEU.

Fair lady!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I have a most serious explanation to demand of you—
an explanation, sir, in which my honour is deeply
concerned—

RICHELIEU.

Your honour, madam ! And who dares attack it ? I am here to defend both it and you. Speak, therefore, I entreat you.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

The question is of a certain wager, which, I understand, your grace laid yesterday.

RICHELIEU.

Bless me, madam, since the truth must be told, I own it, there was such a wager. But, believe me, I was devoted to you long before any such question arose. From the first moment of beholding you, I felt that my heart was no longer my own. I followed you from Paris to Versailles, from Versailles to Chantilly ; you, you alone, drew me hither, I swear it. This wager was proposed to me by two other scapegraces like myself ; you were not the object of it, believe me—your name was not even uttered in the agreement. The first woman who passed was the person concerned in the bet ; you were that person ; my honour was engaged in the winning of my wager ; it so happened, that my love, too, was most deeply interested in its success. This, madam, is the truth ! If I have sinned against you, believe me, the crime was not premeditated, and pardon me.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

My lord duke, I pardon you, hard though it be, and you yourself, I think, must acknowledge it to be so. When one has lost rank, station, fortune—when, from the wreck of all, one has rescued nothing but a stainless reputation—confess it, sir, 't is a cruel thing to see that reputation, which should be respected as a holy possession, bandied from hand to hand by dissolute idlers, who, unable to attack it, dare thus attempt to trifle it away. Nevertheless, my lord duke, in favour of all that you have done for me, though now I know the source of that kindness, which I had supposed disinterested, pure, and noble, I pardon you this cruel and insulting wager; but upon one condition, however, that you will explain to me how, last night, this note was thrown from that window, between ten and eleven o'clock. Read it, sir, read it.

RICHELIEU.

That were useless; I know its contents.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You know them?

RICHELIEU.

Why, is not the handwriting mine? If I were inclined to deny it, the signature is there at the bottom.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You wrote this note?

RICHELIEU.

I acknowledge it.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You threw it from that window?

RICHELIEU.

Even so.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

And to whom?

RICHELIEU.

My dear madam, how the deuce should I know?
To the person who was waiting for it, I presume.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You were here last night—here in this chamber?

RICHELIEU.

Most certainly.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

But you were here without me?

RICHELIEU.

What—what—without you?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Do you dare to say, that you were here with *me*?

RICHELIEU.

Why, most indubitably.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

With me?

RICHELIEU.

Of course.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

My lord duke, 't is a lie!

RICHELIEU.

A lie?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

An infamous lie!

RICHELIEU.

My dear madam, when a woman uses that sort of language to a man, he has nothing for it but to leave her presence.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You shall not stir, my lord! What, because your name is Richelieu, because you are a thrice noble duke and peer of the realm, do you think, sir, that it shall be permitted you, for the sake of a pitiful wager, in which you fancy your honour compromised, to libel a woman—and when that woman has lost everything in this world but the love of an honest man, whom she loves, to make her, by your vile calumnies, forfeit that

best, most precious treasure? Sir, sir, I appeal to your ancient name, to your noble station, to your honour, my lord duke, which is disgracefully losing its way. I appeal to you, sir, and you will retract what you have said; you will do me right; you will bear witness to the truth—the truth! Yes, my lord, here before me, whom you have so deeply injured, and you will hesitate the less to do me this tardy justice, because I am but a poor, helpless, defenceless woman, who claim it at your hands!

RICHELIEU.

Upon my soul, you almost persuade me that I am in the wrong. I suppose I ought to have pretended to lose my wager. Come, what can I do? Shall I write to the chevalier? I can tell him, you know, that I found the doors all shut here last night, and that therefore, of course, the note I threw out of the window means nothing at all. Shall I tell him that I have lost my bet? In short, what shall I do, say, or write? For God forbid that my absurd vanity should be the means of breaking off a match, on which, you say, your happiness depends. I would rather sacrifice my own—certainly I owe you no less.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

My lord duke, the wickedness of what you are now saying passes all belief—'t is fiendish! No, sir—no, no—I ask no letter, I want no writing. What I demand, what I insist upon, is, a confession now here, this very

instant, that every word you have uttered hitherto is false, and that in uttering them you have despised truth, disregarded your name, and disgraced your honour! You shall confess, sir, that all you have said was a slander—a base, cowardly slander. I cannot stop to choose my words; I speak those that my indignation prompts me with. You shall confess this, sir—and though I dare not promise, then, that you will escape my contempt—you may, at all events, rest assured of my forgiveness.

RICHELIEU (*whispering*).

Now, why the devil could n't you make me understand all this time that we were overheard—that some one was concealed—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

No one is concealed, sir; no one overhears us; there is no one here but myself. Answer, then, to me—I demand it!

RICHELIEU.

Then, if indeed no one is here, but you—if indeed I am to reply to you, alone—I will confess, that I thought myself pretty well versed in the arts of your most subtle sex; instead of which, I find myself a mere tyro in the science, every day they teach me something new—to me, who every day think I can learn nothing fresh upon that subject. Moreover, I must further confess, that to

you was reserved the honour of giving me the most complete lesson in this kind that I have yet received in all my life—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Enough, my lord duke—leave me!

RICHELIEU.

I obey, madam; not without a hope, however, that when I present myself again this evening, which I shall do at the same hour when you condescended to receive me yesterday, I may be more welcome than I have appeared this morning.

[*Exit.*]

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Great God! is it possible?

D'AUBIGNY (*coming from her room*).

Well madam!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh! oh! oh!

D'AUBIGNY.

I have obeyed you—I concealed myself—I listened—I *heard*—and, in spite of all, I kept my word, and did not appear. I hope you are satisfied.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry!

D'AUBIGNY (*going*).

Leave me.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry, hear me. Yes, you were right to fear and warn me yesterday. Yes, yes, your forebodings were all but too true—yes, some fatality seems to conspire against us both—both—for it strikes you, as well as me, Henry! But, oh! you shall not leave me thus; there is some horrible machination in all this—an invisible hatred, proceeding from I know not whence, seems to enfold and stifle me, Henry—it cannot be that, at once, suddenly, my voice has lost its power over your heart—Henry, you cannot, cannot believe it possible that, in one hour, I have forgotten the principles of a whole life—Henry, it is impossible that, in a single day, I should have become lost and infamous. Good God! why, if some one were to come and swear to me that you had committed a crime, or a cowardice—fled in battle, or murdered in secret—no, no, no, Henry, I should not, I could not, I would not believe it!

D'AUBIGNY.

To the purpose, madam; the duke, it seems, was here last night.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I do n't deny it.

D'AUBIGNY.

From this room he passed into the next apartment.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

He may have done so.

D'AUBIGNY.

Oh! you confess it, do you, at last?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Yes, I confess *that*—but you do not know, you cannot know---

D'AUBIGNY.

Then I must infer that you were not in this room; then you passed the night elsewhere, it seems—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry, I have taken a terrible oath; I can tell you nothing; Henry—I have sworn—

D'AUBIGNY.

Merciful Heavens! is there no one who, to save us both from madness, can relieve you from this cursed oath?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Yes, yes, you are right; Heaven inspired you with the thought. Oh! yes, when she sees of what horror I

am accused, she will surely let me tell you all—and then you will see, you will know—(*rings, MARIETTE enters*) Madame de Valcour—the marchioness—where is she? Pray inform her, that I wish to speak with her instantly, and that I entreat her to come without a moment's delay—go! go!

MARIETTE.

Her ladyship went to Paris this morning with the Duke de Bourbon, and will only return in time for the ball this evening.

[*Exit.*

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Why then, it is a fatality! a horrible fatality! Henry, wait till this evening, this evening you shall know all! (*He is going, she stops him.*) Henry, do not leave me; Henry, I swear to you—

D'AUBIGNY.

You are right, it is a fatality! Yesterday, at noon, you leave your hotel to come and reside in the palace. Yesterday evening I came, and, for the first time, my presence disturbs and troubles you, and you desire me to leave you. You solemnly swear to me that you will not receive the duke; as my feet leave the threshold, he enters your apartment. For the last hour you have been denying that he came at all; and now you confess, not only that he came, but that it is possible he may

have remained here till three o'clock in the morning! You say you were not in this chamber, and you cannot tell me where you were. You are bound by an oath—you have sworn—a sacred pledge compels you to silence; one person, however, can remit this oath, one person only, and that person has left Chantilly. Oh, you are right! it is a fatality, no doubt, a strange fatality; so strange, indeed, that it passes all belief, and I declare to you, madam, that I do not believe it.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What can I say to you, Henry? Yes, every proof is against me. Yes, if my life were at stake, my life would be forfeited, as I fear my honour will; but were my head this moment on the block, I would not break my oath! You must act according to your conviction, Henry; go, I detain you no longer.

[Falls into a chair.]

D'AUBIGNY (*goes towards door*).

Hear me, Gabrielle! I know that that man has mysterious and inscrutable means of accomplishing his vile purposes. Confess, then, he gave you some potion, some narcotic, some accursed, poisoned draught. Confess it! he entered here while you were still under its influence, and you did not awake till too late. Say this, confess this, and my love for you shall be the same as ever, and you shall still be mine, mine, when I have

murdered that villain. O Gabrielle, confess this, for even this is better. I can understand—I can believe—I can forgive this; but tell me no more of unaccountable absences and incredible oaths. O Heavens! see how I love you; see how I cling to my trust in you. The way I offer you is easy; I give you myself a ready excuse. If you have deceived me, if you are really guilty, take, in pity, take advantage of the pretext my very love has given you. Say, say he resorted to stratagem, to violence—say he alone is guilty, my vengeance shall fall on him alone. In the name of God have mercy on me, and say something that I can believe, that I can imagine true, unless you would have me go mad, here at your feet, and die cursing you and Heaven! In the name of God, upon my knees, Gabrielle, I implore you speak! speak—have mercy on me—speak!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I cannot utter an untruth, even for you, Henry. I have not seen the Duke de Richelieu since yesterday evening at eight o'clock.

D'AUBIGNY.

This is too much. And now my course is clear.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I implore you!

D'AUBIGNY.

Leave me, madam, leave me.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry, Henry, have mercy !

D'AUBIGNY.

For the last time, will you confess the truth ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I have done so.

D'AUBIGNY.

Then, Heaven may forgive you, but I never will.

[*Rushes out.*

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE (*falling on her knees*).

O God, have pity on me !

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT IV.

SCENE 1.

An apartment of state in the Palace at Chantilly. D'AUMONT, D'AUVRAY, CHAMILLAC, and other gentlemen, at a gaming table on the right of the stage. Two others, playing at dice, on the left.

MADAME DE VALCOUR *and* RICHELIEU, *walking about.*

RICHELIEU.

Upon my honour, I don't understand this business the least in the world myself. She maintained to me that she did not know what I meant, with the most miraculous assurance.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

But how did you get into the room? Do explain that to me.

RICHELIEU.

Excuse me—that is a useful secret. But you don't know the best of the story yet: the man who betted against me—who held the stakes—the Chevalier d'Aubigny—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Well?

RICHELIEU.

Was in three days to have married this very girl, this Gabrielle de Belle Isle.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Good gracious! you do n't say so. And how has he taken the business?

RICHELIEU.

Why, I rather think, heroically and tragically to the last degree.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

No, really?

RICHELIEU.

Why, he has called upon me three times to-day, leaving his name each time, and the hour at which he called. Unluckily, I was out hunting—where, by the by, I've done up a capital horse—but as I came home, and was informed of the trouble the chevalier had taken in my behalf, I returned his civility, of course. It was decreed, however, that we were not to meet—for he was out when I called on him—so I left my card, and wait further measures from him. And what news do you bring us from Paris, my dear marchioness?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

None whatever. I hardly had time to alight before I came back again. The Duke de Bourbon arrived just

in time to help the king into his carriage; and his majesty, with more than his usual cordiality even, begged him not to be late at supper, because, after supper, he wished him to make one in his rubber. I think, really, we are in higher favour than ever.

RICHELIEU.

Look sharp after our dear bishop, that's all; if a gust comes, it will be from his quarter. As for me, the last time I saw him he looked so devilish sweet upon me, that I've been terrified at it ever since.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

My dear duke, you slander him! He's a worthy man, who looks with indifference on earthly greatness, and only sighs for privacy and seclusion. Why, you surely have forgotten that, on the death of the regent, it was he who presented the Duke de Bourbon to the king.

RICHELIEU.

Um! Perhaps he thought, if he presented himself, the effect might not be altogether so good.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I think you are mistaken; for you see yourself, that at the slightest difficulty or disagreement, the bishop is always ready to throw up his hand and forsake the game.

RICHELIEU.

Yes; and by trying that experiment twice he has ascertained, beyond a doubt, that his royal pupil cannot endure his absence. You say he sighs for privacy, and abhors power, pomp, and station—take my word for it, we shall yet live to see him cardinal and prime minister. Don't you think so, D'Aumont?

D'AUMONT.

My dear fellow, I have the vilest hand.

RICHELIEU.

Never mind; you know the saying, 'Who loses at play wins in love.'

D'AUMONT.

May be so; but, in spite of the proverb, I'm unlucky every way.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

You must not say so just now, my dear duke. I was coming to ask you to dance with me in the third quadrille.

D'AUMONT.

The third! that's a long way off.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I'm engaged for the two first. Monsieur D'Auvray, have the kindness to give your hand to the Duke de Richelieu. I have a word to say to you.

RICHELIEU.

Here, D'Auvray, give me your cards. When you come back, I promise you, you shall find D'Aumont beaten into good humour.

[*Sits down to play with D'AUMONT.*]

D'AUVRAY (*walking about with MADAME DE VALCOUR*).

I wait your commands, madam.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Presently—I do not wish to be overheard.

D'AUVRAY.

The devil! a secret conference.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Cry halt to your vain imaginations, for they are already on a wrong scent, I assure you. The matter is this: if you should happen to see the Chevalier D'Aubigny come in—that young lieutenant in the king's guard, you know—pray keep your eye upon him, for I suspect something like a duel is brewing between him and Monsieur de Richelieu.

D'AUVRAY.

Richelieu again! Upon my soul, he gives me more trouble than the whole French nobility put together. And what is this duel about?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

I am not quite sure ; but whatever its origin may be, 't is your duty, as lieutenant of my Lords High Marshals of France, to prevent it, sir. I have warned you, and your business is to be on your guard. And now be so good as to take me back into the ball room, chevalier, for our secret conference is ended.

RICHELIEU (*showing a handful of money*).

Here, D'Auvray ; I am doing a capital business for you.

D'AUVRAY (*leading MADAME DE VALCOUR into the ball room*).

Very well, go on with it.

[*Exeunt.*

RICHELIEU.

I told you, D'Aumont, you ought n't to play against me ; you 're sure to be beaten.

D'AUMONT.

Double the stakes.

RICHELIEU.

With all my heart.

[*Enter D'AUBIGNY.*

D'AUBIGNY (*from the door*).

At last !

[*Comes slowly forward, and stands opposite RICHELIEU.*

RICHELIEU.

Aha, chevalier! So there you are at last.

D'AUBIGNY.

Yes, my lord duke. Can I say two words to you?

RICHELIEU.

The moment this deal is over I'm at your service.

D'AUBIGNY.

I can wait.

RICHELIEU.

That's well! Send me over your money, D'Aumont. Thanks! Chamillac, take my place, it's a lucky one. (*Getting up.*) Now sir!

[CHAMILLAC *takes* RICHELIEU's *place*.

D'AUBIGNY.

I waited yesterday morning in the street till four o'clock, to see your grace.

RICHELIEU.

Very possibly, chevalier. I left the palace by the park gate.

D'AUBIGNY.

I have done myself the honour of waiting upon your grace three times to-day.

RICHELIEU.

So I was informed, sir, to my great regret; but I presume you are aware that, as soon as I returned from hunting —

D'AUBIGNY.

Yes; you were so good as to call at my lodging. (*They bow to each other.*) I presume, my lord duke, that it is unnecessary for me to state the motive of my importunity.

RICHELIEU.

Um! I rather think, chevalier, I have some idea of it.

D'AUBIGNY.

You understand, sir, of course, that when a man has attacked the honour of a woman, whose father and brothers are prisoners in the Bastile—

[D'AUVRAY *comes in at the back, and approaches them by degrees.*

RICHELIEU.

He is answerable to her lover. Upon my honour nothing can be more obvious, my dear chevalier, and I am entirely at your command.

D'AUBIGNY.

I need not add, that the *real* cause of our encounter must not be known.

RICHELIEU.

The cause shall be the last comet, or the warm weather, or anything, in short, that may suit your fancy; besides, I have no doubt we shall find accommodating seconds.

D'AUBIGNY.

My lord duke, might it not be more accommodating to have none at all?

RICHELIEU.

Oh, very well. You will take a walk, for instance, in some place agreed upon between us. I shall happen to be out at the same time, and chance to ramble in the same direction, so that, in point of fact, it will be an encounter and no duel.

D'AUBIGNY.

Your place, sir?

RICHELIEU.

The nearer the palace the better.

D'AUBIGNY.

The avenue which leads to the wood, then.

RICHELIEU.

Charming!

D'AUBIGNY.

Your grace's time?

RICHELIEU.

Name your own hour, my dear sir.

D'AUBIGNY.

Nine in the morning.

RICHELIEU.

Agreed ! The arms ?

D'AUBIGNY.

It is unnecessary to specify them, we are both gentlemen, and a gentleman's weapon is his sword. We go out as usual, with our sword on, and excite nobody's curiosity or interference by so doing.

RICHELIEU.

Excellent ! To-morrow, then, at nine o'clock, in the avenue leading to the wood, and with no weapons but our swords.

D'AUBIGNY.

Just so, my lord duke.

D'AUVRAY (*touching them on the shoulder with a baton*).

In the king's name, stand ! You are hereby ordered to appear on the eighth day from the present, before the High Court of my Lords Marshals of France.

D'AUBIGNY.

So, overheard !

RICHELIEU.

D'Auvray ! The devil take you, my dear fellow ; one really cannot have three words of comfortable difference in peace and quiet now, without conjuring up you and your staff of office.

D'AUVRAY.

Gentlemen both—you, duke, and you, chevalier—take notice this is no jest ; you are officially warned, and from this moment your heads are between the axe and the block.

RICHELIEU.

How confoundedly pleasant !

D'AUVRAY.

Give me, therefore, your word of honour, both of you, that until my lords marshals have determined the case, there shall be neither duel nor hostile encounter of any sort between you.

RICHELIEU.

It's none of my business, chevalier ; let Monsieur d'Aubigny give you his word, and then you shall have mine ; otherwise, I must inform you, that I am bound to follow him if he pleases in this matter, even to the scaffold.

D'AUBIGNY.

My lord duke, I would take your life ; but I would have taken it myself. Trials and judges are useless in

our case, sir; the only judge between your grace and me must be God. Monsieur d'Auvray, I pledge my word to you!

D'AUVRAY.

That neither duel nor encounter shall take place between you.

D'AUBIGNY.

Upon the honour of a gentleman!

RICHELIEU.

Upon the honour of a peer!

D'AUVRAY.

Very good, gentlemen; of course, I rely upon your word.

[Goes and looks over the card-players.]

SERVANT (*entering*).

A courier, this moment arrived from Paris, desires to speak with the Duke d'Aumont immediately, on his majesty's business.

D'AUMONT (*getting up*).

Gentlemen, will you excuse me?

CHAMILLAC.

The king's service first, my lord duke!

[Exit D'AUMONT, following the footman.]

RICHELIEU.

Really, chevalier, I'm in despair about this baulk.

D'AUBIGNY.

Console yourself, my lord duke—I hope to find a remedy for it yet. Of course, you are aware that the matter could not blow over thus, and that I should not have given my word so easily, unless I had found a better way of ending the whole business. And did your grace really suppose that so short and easy an explanation had already satisfied me? If so, sir, you have done me yet another injury.

RICHELIEU.

To tell you the truth, chevalier, I was a little surprised at the readiness with which you acceded to Monsieur d'Auvray's proposal.

D'AUBIGNY.

I should think your grace might have understood it, however. The cause of our duel, my lord, cannot be dragged before a tribunal—Mademoiselle de Belle Isle is already dishonoured enough, without the public disgrace of such discussions; but believe me, my lord duke, there are other ways of settling this quarrel.

RICHELIEU.

Permit me to remind you, sir, that you have given your word of honour—

D'AUBIGNY.

Not to fight your grace—that's all; but the man who means to be revenged of an insult—the man who has lost peace, happiness, everything in this life—the man who has sworn to kill his enemy, or be killed by him—that man, my lord duke, for one means that fails him has a thousand others ready at his hand. All that he asks is, to find an adversary brave and loyal enough to allow that, to the man whom he has robbed of every hope, he has no right to refuse any satisfaction.

RICHELIEU.

I flatter myself, sir, that you will find in me precisely such an adversary.

D'AUBIGNY.

And, therefore, I gave my word; for I reckoned upon your grace's courage.

RICHELIEU.

You were quite right, my dear sir; and the devil take me if I back out from anything you propose.

D'AUBIGNY.

Very good, sir. Here are dice; he that has the worst of three throws—

RICHELIEU.

What then? It's like a game at forfeits.

D'AUBIGNY.

Shall blow his brains out, my lord duke. That's a kind of duel my lords marshals take no cognisance of.

RICHELIEU.

Ha! ha! ha! 'Pon my soul, do you know, that's a most ingenious contrivance of yours.

D'AUBIGNY.

You hesitate, sir?

RICHELIEU.

My dear fellow, it's the funniest notion I ever heard of in all my life.

D'AUBIGNY.

Your grace refuses then?

RICHELIEU.

No, no, no, not precisely—

D'AUBIGNY.

Have a care, my lord duke; this is the second time that it has happened to your grace—

RICHELIEU.

What, sir?

D'AUBIGNY.

To be arrested, in the most convenient manner, at the moment of receiving a challenge.

RICHELIEU.

Well, sir?

D'AUBIGNY.

So that it might almost be supposed that Monsieur d'Auvray was in the secret beforehand.

RICHELIEU.

Oh! that won't be supposed now, for I accept the challenge.

D'AUBIGNY.

Well said, my lord duke; I looked for nothing less from you.

RICHELIEU.

Only, my good friend, I must beg for six hours' reprieve after the game; because, you see, if one doesn't happen to be a bastard, one has always a little business to attend to in such cases before one—

D'AUBIGNY.

Six hours—so be it.

[They sit down to the dice.]

RICHELIEU.

Charmed to have a throw with you.

D'AUVRAY.

O Lord! what, you're dicing together now?

RICHELIEU.

Yes, D'Auvray; have you a mind to go half in my stake?

D'AUVRAY.

Yes; but where's your money?

D'AUBIGNY.

We are playing on parole. Begin, my lord duke.

RICHELIEU.

No; excuse me—do you begin.

D'AUVRAY.

Chamillac, I bet fifty louis upon Richelieu.

CHAMILLAC.

Very good; I'll take you.

D'AUVRAY.

Come, gentlemen!

D'AUBIGNY.

Since your grace insists upon it—(*throws*)—Five

RICHELIEU (*throws*).

Eight!

CHAMILLAC.

Come, come, I want my revenge.

D'AUVRAY.

Are they going on with it?

RICHELIEU.

Yes.

D'AUBIGNY.

It's you to begin, my lord duke.

RICHELIEU.

I hope my beginning will bring you luck this time
—(*throws*)—Nine!

D'AUBIGNY (*to* CHAMILLAC).

You have no chance, Monsieur de Chamillac; I am
sorry you betted on my side — (*throws*) — Eleven!
that's better.

CHAMILLAC.

Quits, d'Auvray.

RICHELIEU.

Do you mean to go on, Monsieur d'Aubigny?

D'AUBIGNY.

Certainly, sir.

D'AUVRAY.

The same bet, Chamillac?

RICHELIEU.

Seven!

D'AUBIGNY.

Seven!

CHAMILLAC.

Nothing!

RICHELIEU.

Shall we stop now, chevalier ?

D'AUBIGNY.

This is my answer—Nine !

RICHELIEU.

Eleven !

D'AUBIGNY (*rising*).

My lord duke, you have won !

CHAMILLAC.

There are your fifty louis, D'Auvray.

RICHELIEU.

Chevalier, I do hope you are not in earnest.

D'AUBIGNY.

And how dare you suppose any such thing, sir ?

RICHELIEU.

Because the thing 's impossible.

D'AUBIGNY.

If it had been impossible, sir, your grace would not have agreed to it.

RICHELIEU.

Yes ; but if I had lost—

D'AUBIGNY.

If you had lost, my lord duke, you would have kept your word, as I shall keep mine.

RICHELIEU.

For God's sake—

D'AUBIGNY.

It is just morning (three o'clock); at nine, your grace, I shall pay you.

[*Exit.*

RICHELIEU (*following him*).

Sir! Sir! You will do no such thing, or you are stark staring mad!

[*The rest of the characters go off gradually into the ball room. RICHELIEU remains in front of the stage, walking about in great agitation.*

RICHELIEU.

He'll do it. Oh, he'll do it, as he says it! There are certain men one need only look at once to know what stuff they are made of. Is there no way to prevent this horrid absurdity? To think that he'll go quietly home to his lodgings—and there, alone, and in cold blood—gad's life, it's worse than a murder! Youth, courage, a fine name, and in six hours to have his brains blown out by a pistol shot! And all for that infernal wager of mine, that I wish to God I'd lost a hundred times over; more particularly as the devil take me if I

know in the least how I won it, after all. If that fellow shoots himself, he'll haunt me all my life! If I was only at Paris I might get a lettre de cachet, and clap him into the Bastile; he would be safe enough there, unless he hung himself up to the window bars; but here, there's nothing to be done—'pon my soul, I shall go distracted!

D'AUMONT (*coming down*).

And upon my soul, I shall go distracted!

RICHELIEU.

You! What about?

D'AUMONT.

Why, about what's happening to me.

RICHELIEU.

Is something happening to you, too? Why, you seem quite upset—agitated! My dear fellow, what's the matter?

D'AUMONT.

Have you heard the news from Paris?

RICHELIEU.

No.

D'AUMONT.

Complete change of ministry; the Bishop of Frejus at the head of the cabinet.

RICHELIEU.

The bishop!

D'AUMONT.

The bishop.

RICHELIEU.

Ah! there, there, there! I said so; I told the marchioness so not half an hour ago, and she pooh, pooh'd at it, in the grandest style. What becomes of Monsieur de Bourbon?

D'AUMONT.

Arrested.

RICHELIEU.

Arrested! a prince of the blood royal!

D'AUMONT.

Arrested, nevertheless. But this is not all.

RICHELIEU.

What, something else!

D'AUMONT.

I have received a letter from the king, ordering the marchioness to her estate, there to remain; banished in fact, till further notice.

RICHELIEU.

Why do they write that to you?

D'AUMONT.

Because, as Captain of the King's Guard, I am to have the honour of escorting her thither.

RICHELIEU.

O Lord ! poor d'Aumont ! what wilt thou do ?

D'AUMONT.

I must do as I am commanded, I take it.

RICHELIEU.

Is any delay granted ?

D'AUMONT.

Not a minute—the express is not to return to Paris till he has seen us off.

RICHELIEU.

Here, D'Aumont ; here comes the marchioness to fetch you to dance with her.

D'AUMONT.

I wish I was a hundred feet under ground !

MADAME DE VALCOUR (*entering*).

What are you about, D'Aumont ? I'm waiting for you.

RICHELIEU.

Poor fellow—the question is not what he is doing, but what he will do; for I assure your ladyship, his mind is by no means made up.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

What do you mean?

D'AUMONT.

Madam—pray forgive me—I am most unfortunate; I am in despair.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Bless us! what's the matter with you?

RICHELIEU.

My dear marchioness, let what will happen, depend upon me as your devoted friend, and use all my influence and interest, if, however, they are not going to the devil with your own!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

My influence lost—my interest! What are you both talking about? Are you both mad?

D'AUMONT.

Madam, the king may not be disobeyed.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Who thinks of disobeying his majesty?

RICHELIEU.

Why he does—D'Aumont does—if he only knew how ; but he is compelled to execute the orders he has just received from court.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

And what are they ? For Heaven's sake, duke, speak !

D'AUMONT.

Do not alarm yourself, madam ; this loss of favour is, probably, only temporary.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Loss of favour ! You will be the death of me, both of you, with your preparations. Come, I'm no coward ; speak out at once, do, and let me know what is the matter.

[*Enter* CHEVALIER D'AUVRAY.

D'AUVRAY (*to* RICHELIEU).

I beg your pardon, my dear duke ; but I must trouble you for your sword—

RICHELIEU.

Hallo !

D'AUVRAY (*showing a letter*).

The king's sign manual.

RICHELIEU.

Prisoner !

D'AUVRAY.

You must go immediately to Paris, to give an account of yourself to the new powers that be.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

For pity's sake, will nobody have the charity to tell me what all this means?

RICHELIEU.

Why, my dear marchioness, it means that your pious, humble, self-denying, meek, and all unworldly bishop is at the head of the government; that D'Aumont has at this moment in his pocket an order to escort you into banishment, and that the Duke de Bourbon is arrested!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Good God, my uncle!

D'AUMONT.

Your uncle!

D'AUVRAY.

Your uncle!

RICHELIEU.

Your uncle!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Gentlemen, for Heaven's sake, lose no time in useless exclamations! What is to be done? But can't I see my uncle?

RICHELIEU.

Of what use were that, since he is arrested?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

If I wrote to the king?

RICHELIEU.

Your letter will be read by the bishop.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

To the queen?

RICHELIEU.

That, indeed—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, yes; she surely cannot have forgotten that I was the means of bringing her out of banishment to place her on the foremost throne of Europe. But who on earth will give my letter to her?

RICHELIEU.

I will, my dear marchioness—depend upon me!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Your grace stands by me in my need! D'Aumont, give me that pen and ink—my head spins round—I scarce know what I am writing! (*Writes.*)

[*The dancers gradually return.*]

RICHELIEU (*snatching the paper from her*).

Stop—stop—stop a bit! Is this your handwriting, madam?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Did not you see me write it? What do you mean?

RICHELIEU.

What do I mean! Why, that if *this is* your handwriting, madam, this note and this petition are your handwriting also, and not Mademoiselle de Belle Isle's; and, if so, who was it that received me last night in her chamber, where I thought she was?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Sir!

RICHELIEU.

Nay, madam, the truth! the truth!—lives as well as fortunes are in every minute that we waste now. Who was in that room last night?

MADAME DE VALCOUR (*rising*).

Myself.

RICHELIEU.

You?

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Your grace's humble servant and your wife.

D'AUVRAY.

His wife!

D'AUMONT.

His wife!

RICHELIEU.

My wife!

MADAME DE VALCOUR

Your wife.

RICHELIEU.

Then I've lost my wager! Then Mademoiselle de Belle Isle was not in the room! Then D'Aubigny need not blow his brains out! Oh, my dear, dear madam, pray excuse me; but, indeed, I am so overjoyed at having lost that cursed wager, that I protest I am not half as much shocked by this news as might have been expected. D'Aumont, D'Auvray, I owe you each five hundred louis. 'Fore God, madam, I'm more obliged to your ladyship for being my wife than words can express! But, come, come, come, let us waste no time in useless exclamations—since you are my wife, madam, give me your hand—and to Paris instantly, to throw ourselves at the king's feet; for unless I can be back here in less than six hours, the bravest young fellow in France will have blown his brains out!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Good God! what do you mean?

RICHELIEU.

Excellent company ! Strange accidents, you see, have occurred to us—some of us have fallen into disgrace, and some into matrimony—'t is little more than three in the morning yet. I shall be back here in six hours, if horses' legs may do it, and hope to find the ball-room not yet empty, and the supper-room still full ! Come, come, madam—my dear marchioness—duchess, I mean—reserve all further particulars for the road ; for I tell you, if that young man's death is to lie at my door, I will never forgive you, or myself, or any human being that has been concerned in so terrible a jest !

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V.

SCENE 1.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE's room.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE *and* a FOOTMAN.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You are sure you remember who I mean ; Monsieur d'Aubigny—the young officer who called here yesterday and the day before—

FOOTMAN.

I know perfectly who you mean, madam.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE (*sealing a letter*).

Well, you must find him immediately. It is quite early yet—hardly seven o'clock. He will certainly not have left his lodging ; give him this note, and bring him with you hither directly. I must speak to him immediately. Before you go, send Mariette to me.

FOOTMAN.

Mariette left the palace last night with her ladyship.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

The marchioness left the palace you say ?

FOOTMAN.

Last night, madam ; her ladyship went away with the Duke de Richelieu before the ball was over.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

But she will come back—she is coming back, to-day ?

FOOTMAN.

I do not know, madam ; but if you please I can inquire.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Yes, pray do ; but, first of all, take that letter, for it is immediate. (*Exit Servant.*) What can be happening ? Yesterday she sent me word that she could not receive me—this morning she has left the palace ! Not a word from D'Aubigny ! I cannot conceive what is going on—

D'AUBIGNY (*in the anteroom*).

Can I see Mademoiselle de Belle Isle ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh, yes, Henry ! Come in ! come in ! I had just written to you. I was expecting you every moment, and yet almost feared that you would not come.

D'AUBIGNY.

It is an unforeseen circumstance, indeed, that brings me—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

No matter what. You are most welcome. Oh, I am so glad to see you again !

D'AUBIGNY.

I have come to ask a service of you—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

A service of me ? Oh, speak !

D'AUBIGNY.

Gabrielle, I have no one in the world but you. My mother died in giving me birth ; my father fell at the battle of Denain. I have no relations, no friends !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

No friends ?

D'AUBIGNY.

I do not know, therefore, to whom I can confide a trust of some importance unless you will take charge of it for me.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What trust ?

D'AUBIGNY.

Papers, that concern my fortune and estate—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

And why do you not keep them in your own possession ?

D'AUBIGNY.

Because I am going away, Gabrielle.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Away ?

D'AUBIGNY.

Yes, I am going to leave you ; and when absence once begins, God alone can tell how long it lasts.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry !

D'AUBIGNY.

I do not wish to alarm you ; but who can foresee what time may have in store for him ? Assuredly, had any one foretold to me the events of the last three days I had not credited them ; but I must endeavour to be no more surprised by misfortune. I shall not, therefore, escape from it, I know ; but it shall, henceforth, find me prepared for it—expecting it.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I have not interrupted you, Henry ; though every word you have uttered has been a dagger to my heart. Go on then, since you do not fear to wound me ; go on, I listen to you most attentively.

D'AUBIGNY.

Oh, believe me, it costs me much to give you a moment's pain; but what I have to say is most important, and once said, it will be said for ever.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Go on—

D'AUBIGNY.

The hour of parting has brought with it solemn thoughts of the countless chances of this weary life. Perhaps—perhaps I shall see you no more again; and I cannot leave you without entreating your forgiveness for my intemperate anger yesterday. Alas! one cannot calmly tear from one's heart a hope that had been its life's blood for four years—for I have loved you thus long—longer, longer! I cannot remember when I loved you not; but I have feared that if I did not return—if—if, in short, if I were to die without seeing you once again, you might imagine that I had died with a heart embittered against you; and this might have caused you anguish and remorse. Therefore, Gabrielle, I am come to bid you farewell—no longer, alas! as a lover leaving his betrothed, but as a brother parting from a sister.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Oh, you are pitiless—pitiless! and you will surely rue, one day, the torture you are inflicting on me now

D'AUBIGNY.

And yet, 't is but the desire that your happiness— if you can yet be happy—may not be disturbed by thoughts of my despair, that prompts me at this moment. Had it been better to leave you in the belief that I hated and cursed you, when in truth I had forgiven you—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Forgiven me!

D'AUBIGNY.

Yes, forgiven you. And it is but very lately that my heart has found the strength to do so; but Heaven has taken pity on me. The best part of this night I have passed within the sacred walls of a church; for we may, and, alas! do, forget God in our senseless hours of joy and happy hope; but when joy and happiness are torn from us for ever, God still remains to us, and then—yes, then, we remember him—we seek him. I had forgotten Him, for my heart was filled with but one thought, and that was you—you; but last night, in the bitter anguish of my soul, I thought on Him—or rather, He mercifully thought on me. I spent two hours prostrate before the altar, weeping and praying! O Gabrielle, Gabrielle, God grant that you may never feel such desperate need of prayers, of tears, and of His holy sanctuary!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

He is mad.

D'AUBIGNY.

No ; no longer mad. I *was* mad, but I have recovered my senses ; for from that church I turned home, calm and resigned at least, if not consoled. Since then, I have put all in order for my departure ; and I have come to confide these papers to you. If I return, you shall give them back to me ; if I do not return, then open them, and let me beseech you to fulfil the last entreaties you will find in them. And now—farewell, Gabrielle !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Good Heavens ! Where is Madame de Valcour ?

D'AUBIGNY.

Will you not say farewell, Gabrielle ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry—you shall not leave me !

D'AUBIGNY.

I must !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Because you believe me guilty ; but listen—listen ; I swear to you, by my mother's soul—by my father's promised freedom—by your life—oh, dearer a thousand times than my own—that I am innocent !

D'AUBIGNY.

I have heard those oaths before; and remember, too, I heard the duke—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You heard him. Well, in spite of his assurance, which surpassed belief, 't was false—all false! He either lied, with wicked and determined purpose, or, like myself, was dupe of some infamous stratagem. Oh, hear me, Henry!

D'AUBIGNY.

Well?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Heaven forgive me! I am committing a sin in speaking this, for I have sworn—but—but—that night, when Monsieur de Richelieu maintains that I received him here, I was not in the palace.

D'AUBIGNY.

You were not in the palace?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

No; I left it at ten o'clock that night, and only returned to it at five the next morning.

D'AUBIGNY.

But, in the name of Heaven, where were you then?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

That Madame de Valcour alone can authorise me to reveal. I have already broken half my solemn promise in telling you thus much; remember that. Have mercy on me, Henry, and urge me no further now, for I have suffered such anguish since yesterday, that only to keep you here I might be tempted to utter all, in spite of a most sacred oath.

D'AUBIGNY.

Absent from the palace the whole night! Good God!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I have said it. Now grant me but this; and if the expectation I hold out to you prove false, then, Henry, kill me; or worse, worse, a thousand times, forsake and despise me for ever! Wait—only wait till I can bring you to Madame de Valcour, and, at her feet, I will implore her to tell you all, and free me from these dreadful suspicions!

D'AUBIGNY.

Madame de Valcour—Madame de Valcour—you know that you will not see her again—that she is gone beyond your reach—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

How?

D'AUBIGNY.

Madame de Valcour is gone.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Gone !

D'AUBIGNY.

Banished to her estate.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Banished !

D'AUBIGNY.

The Duke de Bourbon has involved her in his ruin. But why do I dwell on these circumstances, which must be as well-known to you, as to myself.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

The Duke de Bourbon is no longer prime minister ?

D'AUBIGNY.

No, Gabrielle ; and your father is free—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

The Duke de Bourbon is no longer minister ?

D'AUBIGNY.

He resigned yesterday, at noon.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

True, true, is it true, Henry ? Speak—speak !

D'AUBIGNY.

What matters it ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Answer me, I say, upon your sacred honour ; is it true that the Duke de Bourbon is no longer minister ?

D'AUBIGNY.

It is true.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Then I may tell you all—then, I am freed from my oath, then—then—then—ah ! Henry, we are saved ! That night—oh ! Heaven be praised ; oh ! Heaven be thanked, we are delivered ! I cannot speak—I am choking !

D'AUBIGNY.

Good Heavens—speak—speak—for pity's sake !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

That night—by favour of an order from Madame de Valcour, and in her carriage, I left the palace. That night in which, unfortunate ! thou believedst I had deceived thy love, and blasted all our hopes—that night I passed in my father's arms—my father, whom I had not seen for three wretched years of dreary imprisonment ; if you doubt me, Henry—he—he, my father himself, shall swear to you, on his white hairs, that I speak the truth !

D'AUBIGNY.

Be silent ! Oh, be silent !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

This was the cause of my confusion ; this was why, for the first, the only time in my life, I urged you to leave me—without being able to assign the real motive for my doing so. I had sworn to the marchioness, who gave me that order unknown to Monsieur de Bourbon, that as long as he continued minister I would keep that secret, which, once known, might have caused her ruin and the death of my father. Ten minutes after you had left my room, I was gone from it, and had but just returned to it when you came the next morning. Now, now, now, 'tis you who are the guilty one, and I the judge ; for, remember, oh ! remember what withering words you have uttered to me—to your own Gabrielle ! Oh ! when you had left me, in scorn, and dreadful anger, when I found myself alone, far from my father, and forsaken by you, I thought God had forsaken me, too, and that I had nothing left but to die !.

D'AUBIGNY.

Gabrielle ! Gabrielle !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Yes, to die ; for since all means of justifying myself seemed denied to me while living, perhaps you would have believed my death. Then, Henry, you would have said, ' Since she has died because I left her, she loved me ; and if she loved me, she could not thus

deceive me !' Now, now, now, will you forgive me—or shall I forgive you? Oh! no, no, neither! Let us forget the bitter past—the future is all our own—the future in two blessed words—I love you, dearest; do you love me still?

D'AUBIGNY.

Hush—hush! And yet tell me—for my benumbed senses seem rushing back suddenly to life—since you were not here, since you were at Paris, every word that villain uttered was false. He lied, that duke—that base, that infamous traducer! (*looks at the clock*). Oh, God! and but half an hour to find him, and tear his heart out—half an hour—one short half hour!

[*Rushes to the door. She stops him.*]

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry, what means this? I stand here before you. I tell you that I am innocent. I prove it to you. I tell you, again, that I love you; oh, most dearly! and instead of answering me—of thinking of me—you speak of nothing but that man! Forget his folly, and despise his calumnies. Let us think now of nothing but my father's restored liberty; let us return home again to Brittany—to happiness!

D'AUBIGNY.

Happiness, Gabrielle, happiness? Oh! it is now your turn to hear a fatal secret.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What? Good Heavens!

D'AUBIGNY.

No—no—leave me—let me go—let me go—let me find him. I will find him, before my time expires.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Henry, you shall not leave this room. I know not what you mean, or what you seek to do; but you shall only cross the threshold of this door over my body, and if you attempt to force me from it, I will raise the house with cries for help!

D'AUBIGNY.

To die now—thus—at such a moment—assassinated by that villain; impossible!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

What horrible words are those?

D'AUBIGNY.

O Gabrielle! come to my arms once more; once more, for the last, last time, lay that dear head upon my heart. So—now, tell me again, again, thou lovest me. Angel, repeat it to me, in this moment of despair. Dolt, idiot that I was, to doubt thee! I should have doubted myself, my eyes, everything but thee; but

stung with the thought of thy treachery, racked with the bitter thought of having thee torn from me, I became mad. Alas ! if thou hadst believed me perjured, and forsworn, thou wouldst have died forgiving me, because thou art a woman—an angel of pity and forgiveness ; but I hungered for vengeance—I thirsted for thy betrayer's blood. I ought not, perhaps, to tell thee this dreadful thing, but all strength and self-command have left me. I met him—challenged him ; we were to fight—

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Heavens !

D'AUBIGNY.

We were arrested ; we passed our word of honour not to fight ; no means remained of encountering him but dragging before a tribunal the cause of our quarrel. That cause was thy dishonour, Gabrielle ; thou wert lost, or my injury unrequited ; then—then—dice lay at hand—the devil prompted me—and I challenged him to play his life against mine, at hazard ; he accepted, for he is brave ; we threw, and I lost !

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE (*shrieks*).

Ah ! now I see it all ! your return hither was but to leave me for ever ; that absence was death. You were to die for me—for me ! Oh ! but you forget, I am not guilty. You wanted to die because you thought me guilty ; you know, now, I am not guilty. I love you

still—I have loved you ever—die! die! you, die! Oh, my God! my God! that fatal man. Why, why did he ever cross my path?

D'AUBIGNY.

Do you not see that I must murder him?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

You shall not leave me, Henry; I will cling to you; you shall not move!

D'AUBIGNY.

And yet there is no other way. If he were dead, no human being knows of what passed between us—none know, that this very day, this very hour, in a few short minutes, I had sworn to blow my brains out.—O Gabrielle, help me! help me! See whither my love for thee has led me; I speak the words of baseness; I think the thoughts of cowardice. See, see how I love thee! since I can contemplate dishonour rather than thy loss.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Love! yes, thou hast love, but no pity! Unclasp thy arms. Not on thy heart, but at thy feet, is now my place. Oh! wert thou thus in anguish to cast thyself down before me, fame, honour, life, all—all would be thine; whilst thou canst see me thus embrace thy feet, and give but half thy soul to love, the rest to pride and

vengeance. How can I help thee? Let me go to that wicked, cruel man. I will implore him to spare thee—to spare us both. O Henry, my heart is bursting—my senses are forsaking me—have mercy on me, Henry! Mercy! mercy!

D'AUBIGNY.

Courage, beloved one! O Heaven! you tear my heart-strings!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Courage to see thee die? Never! never! but to die with thee, yes, now, this instant, since it must be so. At least—at least, together! Hush! hush! listen! 't is his voice! 't is the voice of the duke!

D'AUBIGNY.

Great God be thanked! thy justice leads him hither. Now, Gabrielle, now do for me to-day what I did yesterday for you. In—in to that room!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

No, no, I will not leave you!

D'AUBIGNY.

Then, by Heaven, I will murder him at your feet!

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

I will go, Henry, I will! but, in the name of Heaven—

D'AUBIGNY.

Go, go, go ! and leave me—quick !

[MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE *goes into the room.*

RICHELIEU (*outside*).

Go to the devil, fellow ! I tell you he is here, and I must and will speak to him !

[*Rushes in ; D'AUBIGNY seizes him.*

D'AUBIGNY.

At length you are in my grasp !

RICHELIEU.

And you in mine ! And a pretty fright I have had of it lest I should come too late.

D'AUBIGNY.

My lord duke, you have lied !

RICHELIEU.

My dear friend, I know it ; and I have galloped thirty miles, without drawing rein, to tell you so ; and I would have told you so six hours ago, but that I was arrested, and carried to Paris, where, fortunately, a justification of three words satisfied his Majesty ; and, thank God, I do not arrive too late !

D'AUBIGNY.

What is the meaning, sir—

[MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE *comes forward*.]

RICHELIEU.

The meaning, sir, is this ; that if you do not receive my heartfelt apologies—if you will not and cannot forgive me—I never will forgive myself for this most painful affair. I have been, all along, the dupe of the strangest accident, believing most firmly myself what I asserted, at the same time that it was utterly false. The cause of this strange mistake, and herself the most innocent accomplice of my delusion, is here ; my wife, Madame de Richelieu—

[*Enter MADAME DE VALCOUR and the ABBÉ.*]

I acknowledge, sir, that Mademoiselle de Belle Isle is the purest angel that ever trod this earth in the shape of woman, and I entreat permission to throw myself at her feet and implore her pardon, for I have insulted her most grossly and most undeservedly ; and I repent having done so, as a man should repent an unworthy and shameful action. Are you satisfied, chevalier ? Is there yet any further reparation that I can make ?

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE ISLE.

Enough, enough, my lord duke—you have a noble heart, sir, and you have proved it nobly ! O madam !

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

My dear chevalier, when I tell you that I was in your Gabrielle's chamber during her absence at Paris, this fatal mystery will all be solved.

D'AUBIGNY.

Oh, Heaven be praised for this respite from despair! My lord duke, your hand; you are a brave and honourable man.

RICHELIEU.

Halt, my dear fellow! it's evident you don't count modesty among my virtues, and yet I have—a little. But here is the beacon whose light shall henceforth point to every virtue that is wanting in my list.

ROSANNE.

Your grace's reformation?—

RICHELIEU.

Is a miracle, my dear abbé! But it was wrought by two, and here they are—the paragon of maids and wives. And now, have all prepared in the chapel, without loss of time, for the solemnisation of these two happy marriages!

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Two?

RICHELIEU.

Yes, madam, if you please! My own unworthiness has divorced me from you hitherto, far more effectually than death ever could have done. The presumptuous folly of my youth rejected in you a treasure, of which my riper judgment owns the worth. Our former union was devised by others, and suggested by expediency; our present one is chosen by ourselves, and on one side at least prompted by love, esteem, and admiration.

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

Oh, my dear, dear abbé, am I not well rewarded? And as for your grace's sentiments, I am willing to believe they make up in vivacity what they want in duration. Now, as for me, my dear duke, since we are come to the closing chapter of confessions, though I may have felt little admiration, and less esteem, for your conduct, during some periods of my acquaintance with you, I have loved you with the most persevering patience every minute of the last six years.

RICHELIEU.

So, now to marry! and then to Brittany, where, mademoiselle, your father, whom the change of ministry has liberated, will meet you; and should the time which must elapse before you are again in his arms prove tedious—

MADAME DE VALCOUR.

We will enliven it, by carefully elucidating all the obscurer facts relative to—

D'AUBIGNY.

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INDEX.

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<i>Ayre's Treasury of Bible Knowledge</i> ..	20	<i>neering</i>	22
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<i>Bacon's Works</i>	3	<i>Cricket Tutor (The)</i>	16
<i>Bayldon's Rents and Tillages</i>	25	<i>Crowe's History of France</i>	2
<i>Beard's Port-Royal</i>	16		
<i>Berlepsch's Alps</i>	8	<i>D'Aubigné's Calvin</i>	1
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<i>Bréhaut on Cordon-Training</i>	27	<i>Defence of ditto</i>	17
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<i>Hassall's Adulterations Detected</i>	26	<i>Loudon's Encyclopædia of Trees and</i>	
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<i>Herschel's Outlines of Astronomy</i>	13	<i>Lowndes's Engineer's Handbook</i>	22
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<i>tions</i>	9	<i>Lyra Sacra</i>	20
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<i>Lawrie's Graduated Reading Books</i> ..	28	<i>Morell's Elements of Psychology</i>	11
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<i>Odling's Chemistry</i>	11	<i>Southey's Doctor</i>	21
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<i>Piesse's Art of Perfumery</i>	15	<i>Tate on Strength of Materials</i>	13
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<i>Problems in Human Nature</i>	16	<i>Thomson's Interest Tables</i>	22
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<i>Record of International Exhibition</i> ..	24	<i>Todd's Cyclopædia of Anatomy and</i> <i>Physiology</i>	11
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<i>Rich's Roman and Greek Antiquities</i> ..	5	<i>Trollope's Barchester Towers</i>	16
<i>Rivers's Rose Amateur's Guide</i>	27	<i>Twiss's Law of Nations</i>	2
<i>Rogers's Essays</i>	17	<i>Tyndall on Heat</i>	11
<i>Rogot's English Thesaurus</i>	7	<i>Tyndall's Mountaineering</i>	8
<i>Romaunce of a Dull Life</i>	16	<i>Ure's Dictionary of Arts, Manufac-</i> <i>tures, and Mines</i>	23
<i>Ronald's Fly-Fisher</i>	15	<i>Van Der Hoeven's Handbook of</i> <i>Zoology</i>	11
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<i>Saxby on Projection of Sphere</i>	25	<i>Watts's Dictionary of Chemistry</i>	12
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<i>Senior's Biographical Sketches</i>	3	<i>White and Riddle's Latin Dictionary</i> ..	6
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<i>Sewell's Passing Thoughts on Religion</i> ..	18	<i>Wit and Wisdom of Sydney Smith</i> ..	17
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<i>Sidney's (Sir P.) Life, by Lloyd</i>	3		
<i>Smith's (J.) St. Paul's Shipwreck</i>	5		
<i>Smith's (G.) Wesleyan Methodism</i>	1		
<i>Social Life in Australia</i>	10		
<i>Southey's Poetical Works</i>	21		

[January 1863.]

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